

AUSTRALIAN DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 1988/89

DOWN SYNDROME - IN CONTEXT

AUSTRALIAN DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 1988/89

DOWN SYNDROME - IN CONTEXT

The Hon Justice Michael Kirby CMG  
Patron of the Association

During the last year I have become increasingly involved in a matter of global importance: the international struggle to contain the AIDS epidemic. In a few weeks I will be attending the second meeting of the Global Commission on AIDS. This is a body established by the World Health Organisation to advise it and public health agencies around the world on the measures needed to combat the spread of the human immuno-deficiency virus.

Work in this area has made me painfully aware of the difficulties of dealing with an urgent problem where prejudice, fear, hatred and loathing stand in the way of rational decision-making. Unfortunately, people in the front line of the AIDS problem are often the subject of discrimination and alienation for their sexual practises or use of drugs.

The need for laws to protect people against discrimination can be justified on moral principles grounded

In the basic dignity of each man and woman. But there are also practical reasons for the good of the individuals concerned and for the well being of society.

The same is true in the case of Down Syndrome. Attitudes based on ignorance and fear must be replaced by knowledge and understanding. That is why the work of the Association is so important. It is taking steps to break down prejudice. By television community announcements. By radio programmes. By a printed directory. By tele-conferencing facilities which reach out to families affected in the distant corners of our continental country. Prejudice removed is not only a step in the way of protecting those affected by Down Syndrome. It is beneficial for the individual released from the blight of ignorance. And it also builds a kindlier society. One which respects the human rights of all of its citizens.

We should extrapolate from our experience and learn that the enemy is intolerance - whatever be the form in which it manifests itself.