

case for next issue

Call for Responses

The case outlined below will be the basis for the In That Case section for the next issue of the *New Zealand Bioethics Journal*. We invite interested readers to provide commentaries for possible publication. Responses should be kept to approximately 500-700 words in length. The editorial board will select the responses to be published in the June 2003

issue of the *New Zealand Bioethics Journal*. We also reserve the right to edit contributions, to avoid repetition of points for example. All editorial changes will be cleared with the authors before going to press. Contributions can be sent by email or by posting a copy to the Editor. Please include your name, address and phone number with your response.

Michael and Diana live in a staffed group home where they receive general supervision and support, which includes learning to be independent. Michael is 30-years-old and has a mild degree of disability from a head injury as a child. He has difficulties learning and remembering new skills, and is sometimes impulsive and has mood swings. Michael has been working in a sheltered workshop and is now undertaking a 'Preparing for employment' course. Michael has a close relationship with his mother who lives in the same city.

Diana is 35-years-old and has a mild degree of intellectual disability of unknown cause. She is the only daughter of rural parents and has been living with them until her move to the group home four years ago. Diana has completed both pre-employment and living skills courses at the Polytech. She is now employed part-time in a childcare centre, following a year's work experience.

Over the past two years, Michael and Diana have developed a close and intimate relationship. When staff became aware of this, they arranged for them to attend health education courses in sexuality and relationships. Prior to this, Diana had been given the Depo Provera contraceptive injection continuously since age 15 without knowing its purpose. She had been told it was 'to keep her healthy'. When Diana learns about reproduction and the purpose of the injections, she refuses to have any more.

Michael and Diana express a clear wish to move into their own flat with some staff support. Staff are generally supportive, as is Michael's mother, but Diana's parents are opposed to the relationship. Before any move takes place Diana becomes pregnant. Both she and Michael are delighted, and with support, they have both begun attending baby care classes. Michael's mother is prepared to lend practical and emotional support; however, Diana's mother has concerns about the safety of a baby in their care and thinks that the baby should be adopted out. She has contacted the child protection services, who are considering applying to the Family Court for an order removing the baby from Diana and Michael at birth. The social worker involved believes the child will be at risk from abuse and/or neglect. She reasons that it is better to remove the child as soon as possible and get permanent care in place rather than wait until what she believes is inevitable removal. In contrast, both Diana's midwife and her childcare employer are supportive of Diana's ability to parent, with support.

The whole situation is distressing for Diana and Michael, and for all those involved.