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Introducing new ideas into existing rigid social/ political settings - the process of change

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Introduction

The following four articles describe the experience of trying to introduce changes in the area of infant and child care in a country that underwent a significant political/social/economic transition from a communist regime to a democratic system. The specific country within which the authors have worked and made their observations is Latvia – the northern European country that was annexed to the Soviet Union after W.W.II. Even though the situation is described from the point of view of the Eastern European republics that were part of the former Soviet Union, the dynamics in many ways are similar to other countries that have been ruled by rigid political or religious regimes. Having recently returned from China, it very much applies to that part of the world.

The first article describes the complicated process of change having to do with giving up previously held beliefs and practices in a long-standing health care system that was so different from the more progressive Western models. Along with that, there was another significant factor to consider – the effect of a political system on the formation of an individual's personality and the effects on child rearing. The second

article will describe infant and child care under the old Soviet system and talk about its positive and negative aspects. Then it will comment on some of the changes that have been achieved in the past two decades.

The third article provides examples of successful mental health projects aimed at young children and their parents. These were started as joint ventures when colleagues from the West brought their experience and ideas to Latvia and enabled the Latvian colleagues to adapt these projects to suit their local culture and needs.

The fourth article presents a very successful venture that involved organizing the media (T.V. and internet) to reach out to young families and provide support through information sharing and social networking.

