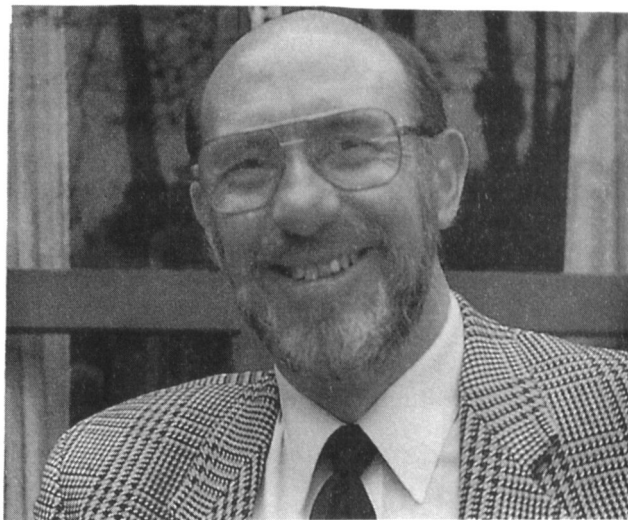


Editorial



Lloyd Owen

With this first issue of *Children Australia* for 1999 we acknowledge the designation of the year of older people by the United Nations. It draws attention to life span issues and raises questions about roles, about dependency, about providing for the future, about collective wisdom and about managing change. The importance of grandparents in the lives of children might also be considered. A currently popular conception to do with services to children and young people is a life course or pathways approach. The range of possible positive pathways through life is myriad enabled and promoted by 'protective' or 'resilience' factors. Myriad also though, are the potential barriers and obstacles and active forces now commonly described as 'risk' factors. Where the latter carry sufficient weight to shift pathways to a negative direction, timely and sufficient help is needed to find a new, positive way forward.

Such ideas have been most recently expressed in the Australian National Crime Prevention Strategy. The summary report is now available on the web (www.ncavac.gov.au) and makes a worthwhile read. I was privileged recently to hear presentations on the research and the strategy at the National Crime Outlook Symposium by Ross Homel from Griffith University and Yvonne Korn from the Federal Attorney General's Department. The significance of prevention and early intervention is again highlighted, but backed by some thorough work on the literature and local and overseas research. Further work envisages some projects around Australia which should add weight to the growing body of knowledge about risk and resilience.

There appears to be a growing appreciation around the country of the value of research although we remain a long way short of the level of investment needed to conduct sound research in a field as difficult as this. Short timelines, low budgets and narrow objectives are frequently encountered and quite often there are mega expectations, also with short timelines and low budgets. At present, three years is a very long view. Nonetheless, some very good work is being done, to the credit of the government agencies and philanthropic bodies funding it and the growing community of researchers and practitioners interested in research. As well as the short term, drop everything else (if that is possible), quick result approach, some broader strategic and more longitudinal approaches are emerging, some driven in part by the

seriousness and visibility of symptoms such as substance abuse, youth suicide, family violence and child abuse.

We hope the expectation of peer review and dissemination, crucial to knowledge development and utilisation, is remembered and that the political aspects of evaluation and the commercial and intellectual property strictures, now commonly encountered in contractual arrangements, do not hamper the desperate need for the best evidence to inform the development and implementation of programs and projects. Listening to our older people should alert us to the significance of broad vision and long term views, the long term consequences of some short term events and the capriciousness inherent in human society. Present events in the Balkans and so many parts of the world build risk in staggering proportions and with startling speed.

With this issue we are able to point to some extension of our editorial board. All States and Territories are now represented. Hopefully this will help to ensure that people involved in innovative work and good practice everywhere in Australia will be encouraged to write about it. We are also seeking to encourage a stronger outlook toward the Asia-Pacific region with the involvement of Dr. Jinchao Yao. We are always interested to hear from people who would like to join the panel of reviewers of books and articles for *Children Australia*, as well as from anyone with ideas about expanding readership or accessing the kind of additional resources which would make our product more accessible and more relevant to the needs of the field while remaining affordable. The field of child, youth and family welfare is not one given to generating economic income although practice failure can add greatly to the economic burden of society. The rapid expansion of web-based technology raises questions for us as it does for most people in the new millennium. Utilisation for the benefit of our client group must be a consideration for the near future.

Contributors to this issue stretch our thinking in a number of directions. Dorothy Scott takes up the issue of creating Social Capital and the distinctive role of the non-government agency in a paper following the theme of her address to the Oz Child annual general meeting. Her thoughts take on additional meaning in the light of the views now being expressed by the Prime Minister and others about the social contract, mutual

obligation and the respective roles of government, business and the 'third' sector. Russell Hawkins and Freda Briggs draw attention to the significance of school based approaches to child abuse prevention and early intervention. The notion of partnerships is now a popular policy point of view. It has been well demonstrated that positive family school relationships generally improve educational outcomes. Partnerships between parents and teachers in child protection is an idea of significance and merit. Their research does point however to a range of sensitivities and difficulties which impinge on the relationship.

Frank Ainsworth attacks some deeply held viewpoints which underpin policy and practice paradigms, suggesting that they may fail young people who are most at risk and, for many who enter the system, our efforts to do justice reap injustice. The failure to provide services of sufficient power, intensity and duration compounds problems and escalates costs. As we see most Australian jurisdictions trying to come to grips with appropriate responses for 'challenging' or 'high risk' behaviour, his paper draws attention to issues of support and control and the acceptability of different models and approaches to intervention and the delivery of services. I, for one, would hope that this would not be taken to be a call to simplistic coercive responses. There is clearly a need to develop positive, powerful responses to circumstances which create significant harm if they persist. Whatever the approach, both needs and deeds should be addressed on the basis of good assessment, commitment to an individual and family focus, constant attention to the broad spectrum of

developmental issues, being there for the long haul, building social networks and attending to the knowledge, power and participation of the client and those important to her or him in decision making processes.

John Honner describes the development of MacKillop Family Services and the basis of the chosen term of 'refounding' for the amalgamation and change process adopted by some veteran Catholic agencies with long histories and distinctive cultures to form a new organisation for the new environment. It will cause many in the field to reflect on their own situations close at hand. Cas O'Neill continues sharing her work on the mental health needs of children in care. The pattern shows high relative incidence of referral to the child and adolescent mental health service but raises questions for further exploration and interpretation.

Book reviews include the seminal work from NSW by Elizabeth Fernandez on 'Significant Harm' and another useful one on behaviour management with younger children.

Chris Goddard reports on a cultural and conference experience in the Philippines and passes on some wisdom from the children about the way services should be, derived from their experience of how they are.

Lloyd Owen

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