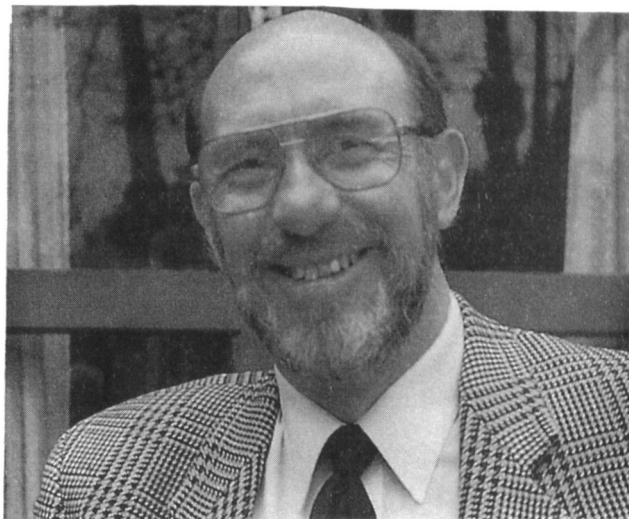


# Editorial



Lloyd Owen

As this issue of *Children Australia* goes to press our senses are being assailed by one of the by-products of our democracy, a Federal election campaign. We are reminded again that social goals, our future vision, are often a matter of contest. Even when they are not, the means of achieving them may be. Children and young people under 18 don't vote. They are largely dependent on others to represent their interests in the political domain. Although capable of having opinions, and often being deeply concerned about the future, their interests are not always heard as clearly as they should be, or explored with as much fervour as those of the more powerful. In a society where competition has been elevated to a special status it becomes even more important to safeguard the interests of those with inherently less power.

Two dominant features of the present political scene are resources and responsibility. The upshot of many ideas and forces at work in recent decades appears to require a mean minded approach to the public provision of health, education and welfare. One consequence of this for children and young people who have trouble at home and who sometimes need out of home care is too often 'too little too late' and /or inconsistent and poorly sustained responses to their difficulties. This is exacerbated by not infrequent passing and shifting of responsibility between spheres of government or between government and non-government sectors. There is an urgent need to clarify our vision of the form these services should take and put them in place with protection from the decimation of across the board budget cuts and the temptation to pass the buck.

In my view all spheres of government and all other sectors of organised society, market, not-for-profit agencies, community groups and families are responsible players in the process of ensuring a development friendly community. One in which individuals can gain responsibility and respect as individuals and as members of a concerned and caring society. Knowing what is needed entails time spent distilling and disseminating knowledge, talking and listening, and including at first hand the stories and perspectives of children and young people themselves.

One opportunity coming up soon is the National Children's Summit from 3-5 December at Parliament House in Canberra, organised by the Coalition for Australia's

Children. Community and corporate partnerships are being sought to contribute to the development and implementation of a framework for policy coordination monitoring and advocacy at the national level for children and young people. (For information contact Suzanne Cremen 02 9228 9406 or Kerrie Jarvis 02 9953 5643). Listening and providing children and young people, their mentors and caregivers, with opportunities to express their view of this rapidly changing world is something we need to do on an ongoing basis.

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the ISPCAN Conference in New Zealand but was treated to a few hours with Robbie Gilligan from Trinity College Dublin as he passed through. He has done a considerable amount of research on what is becoming a popular strand of thinking, that of identifying and finding ways of building or enhancing resilience factors for children and young people. There was talk of the significance of opportunities provided in school, spare time and community experiences and key turning points which might shift problematic developmental pathways back to a healthier track. The Children's Research Centre associated with the college has published quite a bit. One article of interest by Robbie is 'Beyond Permanence?: The importance of resilience in child placement practice and planning', *Adoption and Fostering*, 21 (1):12-20, Spring 1997. I was similarly treated to a presentation by Gillian McIvor and Fiona Patterson from Scotland. They have been putting energy into best practice models in juvenile justice. There were interesting insights about what is helpful in supervision and community work for older and younger probationers, and an integrated, collaborative, community-based approach for under 16 year old persistent offenders in the Freagarrach Project sounds like an exciting initiative.

The shape of services to come is increasingly able to be informed by research and international cross fertilisation. In my view it is becoming increasingly evident that services should be organised with a strong local focus and considerable flexibility in funding and operation. Family support, fostering and residential care are all likely to be important elements delivered within an ecological framework which takes full account of family and social networks. Developmental pathways, trajectories or careers provide an important conceptual strand with assessment and

intervention planning allowing comprehensive scanning, but specific and detailed action objectives for case management, targeted intervention and review. Action plans and objectives should be developed with the young person and those intimately involved with them to ensure relevance, ownership and empowerment in both process and outcome. They should give as much or more attention to building on strengths as they give to addressing problems. Appraisal of risk factors and protective factors present in the life space, life course and lifestyle will be part of assessment, but intervention will give maximum attention to promoting resilience. Commitments must include some for the long haul, where possible chosen and managed by the young person within a normal micro-system. We are hopeful that the CAFWAA practice exchange in Canberra in November will help to consolidate this thinking.

In acknowledgement of some additional support for the journal from the La Trobe University Publications Committee, this and future issues of *Children Australia* are being jointly published under the La Trobe University Press imprint and Oz Child. Steps are also being taken to form a new national editorial board. The members will be added also to the journal's already extensive panel of reviewers to whom we are indebted for their ongoing support of *Children Australia*. We are also keen to build up a group of book reviewers who are willing to return the books reviewed to the Oz Child Information Service library stocks. We know that the usual reward for being a book reviewer is to get to keep the book. The Information Service does operate a borrowing system for books and videos as well as the monthly abstracting and literature searching system for subscribers. If we can get a book review system to work, there should be a broader benefit for the field.

In this issue Cas O'Neil and Deb Absler provide the first of some articles they have produced which will be of particular interest to those associated with out-of-home care in its various forms. "It must be because" ... Non-biological care and mental health' reviews literature and research which takes account of the involvement of these children and young people with mental health services. They begin to tease out some of the elements which might account for the apparent over representation and possible under servicing of this client group while indicating that a new era of greater collaboration between mental health and child welfare practitioners has begun. In the lead up to the International Foster Care Conference, *Fostering the Future*, to be held at Melbourne University in July next year, we are hoping to hear more from out-of-home care workers and researchers about the state of the art in Australia. Kevin Bain draws on observations from a travelling fellowship, the literature and his experience as a parent and board member in intellectual disability advocacy

bodies to explore some issues around out-of-home care for children with disabilities. He enters a policy area fraught with a measure of controversy, often affected by firmly held ideological stances and much family pain. He points to a dearth of analysis around models of care and some marked variation in policy stance and practice in different jurisdictions. The field is challenged to address the reasons for and the outcomes of its policies and service priorities. Kevin's arguments suggest the need for a broader view.

School and the family are sites of high impact on life course. They are also sites of conflict and aggression, potentially dangerous and demeaning places when the relationships and practices within them are out of kilter. Dale Bagshaw from the University of South Australia reports on an extensive study which explored what adolescents say about conflict in secondary schools. Focus groups provide a window on this world leading to some thoughts about school based and some broader community strategies, which clearly warrant ongoing attention. Bernadette Saunders and Chris Goddard continue the theme of violence and the 'fuzzy distinction' between physical discipline and physical abuse. As the beating of wives by husbands is no longer condoned, why do our law and folk law continue to condone the beating of children? A challenging update on the subject is provided here. Schooling for young people in trouble and in care is a vital and vexing subject. Robert Long reports on an alternative education and training program in the ACT which employs a range of strategies to address the barriers for young people in substitute care. The philosophy, practice and intended outcomes are described. Some early evaluation is reported giving support for the program's effectiveness.

Book reviews span some interesting subjects. One picks up the steadily expanding interest in family group conferencing, another the ever present important need of parent advice and support. Attention is then drawn to three recent books dealing with residential care. All relate to practice proposals based on research and should be of benefit to policy makers and all concerned with out-of-home care.

In a world obsessed with economic growth we are yet to realistically address issues of poverty and inequality. The recently released United Nations Report on Human Development for 1998 makes it clear that Australia is not an exception to these globally experienced problems. Chris Goddard takes us into some poignant literature reflecting this theme via Orwell writing in 1937 and Davies in 1998. What is to be done?

Lloyd Owen