

and dysfunctional or abusing behaviour patterns being repeated during access.

Another key chapter on 'preparation and planning for contact' discusses the importance of written agreements. Macaskill concludes that these should not only be explicit about the practicalities of arranging contact, but also include a review system to facilitate changes if the children's safety is compromised and to allow for their changing needs and views about access as they mature and develop.

The final chapter raises perhaps the most important message of this work – that finding an alternative family to care for a child permanently is not the end of the work but the beginning of a new phase in a process that needs to be sustained into adulthood. Post placement and post adoption support for carers to manage behavioural and attachment issues has been recognised as vital in many cases. This work demonstrates that if new parents are also going to be able to sustain, supervise, review and support children's contact with their birth family for many years, at times they are going to require additional significant post placement and post legalisation resources.

Overall Macaskill has single-handedly collected and clearly presented an enormous amount of rich data. It is sometimes difficult to discern whether the data originates from interviews with caregivers and children, or from social workers making 'after the event' assessments of what may have contributed to placement difficulties or breakdowns. Despite this she has managed to convey key findings in an organised and eminently readable way, enhanced by the inclusion at the end of each chapter of a comprehensive summary of the key conclusions.

The applicability of these findings and the proposed good practice guide to the Australian context will vary between states with their different legal mandates and policy stances on permanent family placement.

In Victoria children who have been subject to child protection intervention and need permanent placement are placed with a view to a Permanent Care Order under the Children and Young Persons Act 1989, rather than adoption. However, workers and Courts in Victoria continue to struggle with many of the issues identified in this book. The insight and guidance provided is already beginning to inform some aspects of practice in Victoria and certainly complements the knowledge and practice wisdom that has been gained over a longer period than in the UK during which it has been the practice in permanent family placement to encourage direct contact between children and their birth family.

It is interesting to note that the theoretical basis for the promotion of contact in adoption and permanent fostering in the UK, detailed by Macaskill on page 4, differs in one significant aspect from those articulated in Australia, or at least Victoria. In the UK the rationale for contact is entirely child centred (even if the practice does not always follow the logic of this stance). It is seen as the child's right to have knowledge of their family of origin in order to form a solid personal and social identity, not to feel guilty about their situation and to know of the continued interest in their welfare by members of their birth family. In Victoria consideration is also given to the rights and needs of the birth family, particularly the birth parents. This can lead to advocacy in favour of levels of direct contact in permanent care that would not be countenanced in adoption placements in the UK or elsewhere.

It is a sobering thought, highlighted in the *Foreword* to the book, that this recent social work practice (that some might call a fad or fashion), as with many others, is based on very limited evaluation of its long-term benefits. This is unfortunate as much experience and practice wisdom about access has been gained in Australia over many years, with apparently little attempt to evaluate outcomes or disseminate knowledge. Instead we rely on overseas research such as Macaskill's to provide the evidence base to practice. Let us hope that the burgeoning alliance between academics and practitioners to develop a coordinated child welfare research agenda in Australia, promoted at the recent Association of Children's Welfare Agencies Conference in Sydney, and to be featured in a future edition of *Children Australia*, includes the area of good practice in permanent placement as one of its priorities. There is no template for best practice in all circumstances. What is needed is evidence, based on sound research, about what works, for which children and in what circumstances.

Macaskill's insight and clarity has once again succeeded in capturing the essence, and succinctly describing the dilemmas involved in making decisions and planning access in permanent placements. Decisions need to be based on an understanding of the purpose of contact in relation to the long term development of the child, and what is feasible for the various players to manage, given their range of motivations, emotional maturity, level of 'generosity of spirit' and the availability of support at times of crisis. These decisions will always be about 'the least detrimental alternative', but require the well constructed and evidence-based guidance for case planners and practitioners that this book provides.

Reviewed by:

Dr Tony Lunken

Domestic violence in Australia: The legal response

Renate Alexander

The Federation Press, 3rd edition, 2002

Renate Alexander's 3rd edition of *Domestic Violence in Australia: The Legal Response* continues the tradition set by the earlier editions which provided straightforward, concise and easy to follow legal advice for those dealing with

domestic violence. The new edition updates the Federal and State remedies, and provides an array of useful contacts and other sources of support for those for whom a legal remedy is inappropriate or insufficient.

Renate Alexander begins this edition by examining what those working to assist the victims of domestic violence need to know – beyond the legal remedies which follow and which comprise the greater part of this book. She presents the current knowledge of incidence and patterns in family violence, and challenges the reader to review and reflect upon the myths regarding domestic violence as often presented in media and popular culture – that the victim has provoked the violence, that the victim is masochistic, that domestic violence is a private matter, and that, because the victim does not always or quickly leave the violent situation, she (and it almost always is ‘she’) only has herself to blame. Renate summarises the present state of knowledge about, and the counter responses to, these myths, and considers the various supportive, financial and emotional resources that may allow the person facing domestic violence to make and carry out a real choice.

The book presents succinctly the various remedies available under the Federal Family Law Act (1975), and examines those available under the criminal law and via the various

specific remedies in respect of domestic violence enacted across the various Australian States and Territories. For each such State and Territory, concise information regarding the nature of the protection orders available, their duration, who can apply, and how they are enforced, is presented.

Although this is a relatively small book, its information is clearly presented, and useful contact details are provided for other supports to which those working in this field might need to refer. I suspect *Domestic Violence in Australia* is likely to be a resource for the human services practitioner, advocate or DV worker – more than the legal practitioner who may find the level of legal practice detail necessitates further legal research in order to enable skilled legal representation. Nonetheless, this is a valuable resource for the practitioner in both the legal and social sciences.

Reviewed by:

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Challenging Silence: Innovative responses to sexual and domestic violence

Jan Breckenridge and Lesley Laing (eds)

Allen & Unwin, 1999

This is an interesting book of sixteen chapters contributed by authors from a variety of disciplines and research, teaching and practice backgrounds. The editors say that the impetus for the book comes from two interrelated concerns. The first is the apparent backlash against the public acknowledgment of sexual and domestic violence. The second is their interest in sharing information about innovative and creative responses with a wide audience of health, welfare and legal practitioners. These two concerns result in the book being structured after the introduction into two major parts. Part 1 explores ‘structures that silence’ while part 2 gives accounts of ‘practices that challenge secrecy and denial’.

In an opening chapter, Breckenridge points the finger at the professions, arguing that their discourses, particularly prior to the challenging movements of the seventies and eighties, served to subjugate and silence the experience and voices of victims of sexual and domestic violence. The power of the private domain and the focus of prevailing views served most often to deny and distort the problem and very frequently to blame the victim. Frequently also remedies not only failed to provide redress, they exacerbated and perpetuated negative consequences. Medical, helping and legal professions contributed to mythologies within cultural values and beliefs which minimized concern and action for victims and at times provided excuses for perpetrators. Included in the historical account is the ‘discovery’ by Freud of childhood sexual abuse in his patients’ histories and his subsequent shift from belief in their accounts to propounding the experiences as fantasies and wishful thinking. This set in train a longstanding, oppressive, gendered stance which dominated till some breaking of the silence occurred amid the revolutions of the

seventies and eighties. Such professionalising forces have not disappeared and the chapter ends with a set of observations seen as a backlash against the gains.

The contributions in Part 1 of the book include chapters on child sexual abuse allegations in the context of divorce; the experience of women in Court as victims of sexual assault; civil legal remedies against violent abusers, including discussion of the effects of consent orders; ‘the too hard basket’ investigating the connection between ethnicity, culture and access to sexual assault services; psychiatric institutional abuse (‘systems that silence’); the science and the ideology of recovered memories of child sexual abuse. Within these there are many clear examples of processes which foster disbelief and suppression or rejection of the stories of victims and considerable weighing of empirical evidence around the issues and various political and ideological influences in play.

Part 2 moves on to a number of interesting contributions which provide examples of victims gaining a voice and being heard and believed. One chapter concerns a New South Wales pre-trial diversion treatment program, which involves offenders, victims and the non-abusing parent shifting the power balance within the family. Another chapter explores the issue of men as victims of domestic violence. It looks at gender differences in the use and form of violence. It concludes that women’s violence is a reality but to claim equivalence of intent, frequency and severity of outcome is a fiction. Another chapter recounts the author’s experience of working with adolescent survivors of sexual assault. Another titled ‘The courage to hear’ discusses abuse survivors suffering from dissociative identity disorder. Next is a chapter