

In summary, the study finds that the service was highly effective in establishing a community alternative to secure accommodation; however, the overall outcomes for the young people in the study group were found to be no better and no worse than for the comparison group in secure care. Transition to unsupported high-risk independence, difficulties in obtaining work or further education, rates of offending and other difficulties occurred at similar levels for the study group as for the comparison group. More encouragingly though, young people in CAPS reported more positively on their care experience. Three-quarters of the young people in CAPS said they 'enjoyed the placement' and their responses indicated that they experienced a high level of acceptance by carers which for some young people was 'profoundly empowering'. The authors also note that the results were achieved by CAPS in a community setting without the loss of liberty which comes with secure accommodation. However the authors caution against promoting one model over the other with both secure care and specialist foster care being described as necessary and effective parts of the same service system.

Chapter 8 considers costs and 'value for money'. The cost of a CAPS placement at £850-£1,400 per week was found to be considerably cheaper than a secure care placement, but not necessarily cheaper than traditional residential care.

The final chapter provides an excellent summary of the principal findings and a discussion of the core issues and challenges. The study confirms that with appropriate planning and supports, foster carers can be found and retained to care for extremely challenging young people. However the researchers also conclude that foster care models cannot be expected to replace residential care. Rather, they provide a community-based alternative to residential care and secure care for some young people.

Can it be done here in Australia? Many would say that our foster care programs are already stretched beyond their limits. At the same time there are examples of expert practice which are claiming success with professional foster care models for high needs young people. The Scottish example presented in this book provides a 'state of the art' example of a relationship-based model of care for this very challenging group of young people. It is an example highly relevant to the current Australian debate. But as the authors conclude, it should be regarded as one model, not the only model of service for our young people.

Reviewed by:

Nigel Spence
Chief Executive Officer
Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

Children, Family and the State: Decision-making and child participation

Nigel Thomas

The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2000

Nigel Thomas has produced a scholarly work based on some impressive research which in turn grew out of practice with children 'looked after' in the English care system. Both the Children Act 1989, which applies to England and Wales, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12), make explicit the expectation that the wishes and feelings of children must be taken into account in decisions affecting their interests. The author embarked on his research to explore 'how much the child's wishes and feelings would really be heard and how much notice would really be taken of them'. In the context of Local Authority processes, particularly around care plans and reviews and the interpretation and administration of the legislation, there are many potentially competing voices and stakeholders with interests in relation to planning processes and outcomes.

Thomas' enquiry has taken him into much broader territory around conceptions of childhood through history and across cultures, and various conceptions of family and State care, before returning to think about research with children in general and the execution and outcomes of his own research.

The research itself includes a quantitative element with a sample survey of decision-making in 225 cases and a very substantial qualitative element involving a detailed study entailing interviews and group discussion with 47 'looked after' children from two local authorities.

There was a substantial lead up to the latter stages of the research which was funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Thomas had explored the issues in relation to children's participation in his earlier roles as case worker and manager, and he had conducted a prior survey of 166 cases drawn from seven local authorities. In his account of these efforts, he shares a great deal of his discovery of the complications and pitfalls of research in this territory. The knowledge gained was put to good use in the funded study.

The book consists of 12 chapters. The first six review from various perspectives the place of children in society. The reader is taken through a range of conceptual and theoretical positions with a fair measure of critical analysis to reveal many of the contested issues and dominant assumptions

which have driven public policy around the status of children and the provision of services for them. Headings include theories of childhood, psychology of childhood, and the rights of childhood. The issue of participation is brought together in a chapter about children, parents and the State, which leads to conclusions which differentiate the position of the three age groups – 0-7, 8-12, 13+ years – in terms of dependency and self determination. This provides one of the platforms for the research to follow in which he examines the middle age group. At this point, some interesting conclusions are put forward and a set of principles are proposed. For young children up to about the age of seven:

it seems clear that most important decisions will need to be made by adults, whether parents or professionals but that children should be given the opportunity to reflect on what is proposed and express their wishes and feelings in whatever way is appropriate for them.

It is also suggested that:

... from about age thirteen, many would agree that the default position should be ... that unless there are strong reasons to impose an adult view of what is in a young person's interests, his or her own wishes and feelings should prevail.

For children in the middle years, the following principles are proposed:

1. The child should have an acknowledged right to take a full part in the discussion which leads up to the decision (*without being obliged to do so if they do not wish*).
2. The choices to be made and their implications should be clearly explained to the child.
3. The child's views should be carefully attended to by all those responsible for making the decision.
4. The decision should then be made by the responsible adults on the basis of what is considered to be in the balance of the child's interests (including the child's interest in having her or his views taken into account).
5. The plan should be explained and recorded with explicit reference to the part which the child's views played in determining it.
6. If the child's wishes are not to be acceded to, the reasons for this should be explained to the child and to anyone else who has a legitimate interest (p. 69).

Attention is then drawn in the next chapter to the particular group of children who are the subject of the research: children aged eight to twelve being looked after by the State. Although oriented to the system in the United Kingdom, there are many Australian parallels and much to be gained from the more extensive research base in Britain. Discussion includes the purpose of care, the nature of the care population, the aims for children, the types of placement, care standards, monitoring, and detailed consideration of

decision making processes and children's involvement in them, including research around communication with children.

The remaining six chapters report on the research, the findings and the implications flowing from them. They provide a very rich account indeed, drawing some conclusions and raising many more questions. One interesting aspect is the author's search for effective methodology and his aim to use a theory-generating paradigm which is primarily qualitative and based in sociological and anthropological traditions. Ethnography guides his entry, with his research colleague Claire O'Kane, into the world of the children, with some innovative approaches to the issues of consent, engagement and communication. Of interest to researchers also is the powerful use of quantitative survey methodology in support of the qualitative paradigm. Thomas also finds useful guidance in the work of Layder (1993) to address the complexity and interactivity of micro and macro-setting influences on the lives of the children and those working with them. The reader is treated to interesting chapters on both children's perspectives and adult perspectives. These raise some interesting differences, not the least of which is the finding that children most wanted dialogue with adults 'to be listened to', and wanted to be supported in having a say, but not for either themselves or the adults to determine the outcome. 'Getting what I want' was the least important ranking of factors in participation in an interesting Diamond Ranking Game (p. 152). In the same game, there was a tendency for adults to assume that children saw 'Getting what I want' as most important (p. 166).

Among the many themes and findings to emerge are some references to the 'Looking After Children' system which, at the time the research was conducted, was in the early stages of implementation in Britain. This approach is now being picked up in a number of Australian States in the hope that it will impact positively on outcomes for children in out-of-home care. It did appear to increase participation though responses to it varied. Working differentially and creatively to facilitate freedom to communicate genuinely with children is an important need which often is not achieved.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion and contribution the study makes is to unpack the way adult assumptions about children's interests and capabilities are at times limited and erroneous. This impacts substantially on whether children are invited to participate, and when they are invited, and whether the structures and processes involved enable their vital contribution to be made and to be heard.

Although the study has been one of children in care, parallels are drawn on many issues for children in families and children in society. This book will interest social researchers, practitioners and parents who could glean much

from different parts of its detail. There is also useful guidance for administrators, policy makers and politicians.

The author's concluding remarks are worth savouring:

In a time when decisions about children's welfare are highly contested both in public and private arenas, and when everyone seems to have a view on what is in children's interests, it is even more important that children's own voices are included effectively in those debates. When the patterns of children's everyday lives are changing dramatically, it is important to understand how those patterns are determined and what part children have to play in the process. At a time when politicians are proposing to introduce curfews for children – in other words are suggesting that it might be an offence for a child simply to be in a 'public' place at the wrong time – the question of what

is a child's place, in the world and in the family, is one that deserves our attention. If we are to understand these things better, we need theories and research that are based on respect for what children themselves might have to say (p. 201).

Reviewed by:

Lloyd Owen
Senior Lecturer in Social Work
La Trobe University
Bundoora, Vic

REFERENCE

Layder, D. (1993) *New Strategies in Social Research: An Introduction and Guide*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Children in secure accommodation: A gendered exploration of locked institutional care for children in trouble

Teresa O'Neill

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 2001

At first glance one might conclude that this book is not relevant for most Australian readers as the style of secure units still operating in Britain has been phased out in all of the Australian States and Territories. Victoria still operates two small secure welfare units where young people can be accommodated for up to 21 days with strict gate-keeping. In fact, these facilities have had, in one case, major refurbishment and in the other, purpose built replacement. The other jurisdictions appear to rely on the channelling of young people with severe conduct problems or self-harming behaviour into the juvenile justice system as offenders, into the mental health system as voluntary or involuntary patients, and sometimes into drug treatment facilities. Frequently these young people move through many home-based or residential placements, can spend much time missing, and when it proves too difficult to maintain them in accommodation and education, they may be left to their own devices as orders expire or are actively discharged. A little time spent in close proximity to the field is sufficient to convey the angst many workers have concerning acting out and self-harming young people and their progress into more coercive and costly adult systems.

A second glance at this book reveals that the research undertaken by Teresa O'Neill canvasses many issues related to the care and supervision of troubled and troublesome young people. These are issues which are high on the agenda of all Australian jurisdictions, though to date it would appear that practice is not as well informed by research as it could be. A number of States and Territories have commissioned work on challenging behaviour, high risk adolescents and

clients with complex needs. The product of this work is often not easy to access in the public domain. The late Robin Clark undertook significant work in a number of jurisdictions (Clark, 2000; Spall, 2002) which pointed to the depth and diversity of issues and the high level of commitment needed to succeed. The impression remains that not a lot of the knowledge gained is yet embedded into practice, and programs are still very susceptible to cost constraints, coordination problems and shortfalls in expertise. Some important viewpoints remain contested and the need remains for ongoing research and evaluation.

The research on which this book is based was carried out in 1996/7 on a sample of six local authority secure units selected to represent metropolitan and non-metropolitan, single and mixed gender, older and newer facilities in different English geographical regions. In these respects, they represent the 31 secure units in England and Wales which accommodate almost 500 young people. O'Neill sees the study coming within an interpretive research paradigm complemented by feminist theories and a children's rights perspective. Rich data was collected from 29 young people and perspectives were also obtained from local authority social workers involved with these young people and from secure unit managers and staff.

The book is divided into five parts. The first explores the research and practice literature. It canvasses the historical and legal context for the secure accommodation of children in trouble in the care and criminal justice systems and proceeds with analysis of policy and professional practice