

The Special Edition of *Children Australia* published in September/October this year was a resounding success and created interest in a number of quarters, including in the media. Our Guest Editors, Philip Mendes and Catherine Forbes, are to be congratulated on their work in putting together this Edition which is an interesting and balanced overview of contemporary issues concerning young people leaving care. As a result, some of you may have heard me interviewed on ABC Regional radio or seen the article by Sue Goss in the *Melbourne Age*. Both these events have encouraged me to think more about how our sector can show leadership on issues affecting the people with whom we work, and how we might go about achieving stronger leadership, locally and nationally.



High on the political agenda of the last few weeks have been the issues of drought, climate change and sustainability. What, you might ask, have these issues got to do with our work? Why would we want to have a voice on such issues? It is my belief that part of our role is to enrich debates on social issues, to ensure a diversity of perspectives is heard and considered — particularly those which will affect the people who receive our services and how our work is carried out. The drought and climate change are already affecting everybody's lives. The ways in which our work is done in the future and the resources at our disposal will inevitably be altered as government priorities shift and funding to our sector is constrained. We need to be proactive now.

I wonder what we are doing in our work places in terms of sustainability? Are we driving small, fuel-efficient cars, recycling paper, conserving energy, refusing to use plastic bags or pander to the fashion of bottled water? Modelling is a powerful way in which each of us can demonstrate care for the environment to colleagues and clients alike. We have opportunities to plan with people beyond the crisis of today; and to educate ourselves and others about ways of working and living that will be sustainable. This is not just academic — we all need to think about whether we want to live in a country that uses nuclear energy, work in a building that leaves unnecessary lighting on all night and is heated or cooled excessively. And what message do these behaviours suggest to others? — It's OK to wear a tee-shirt and turn up the heating so you're warm enough rather than put on warmer clothes ... to expect an affluent lifestyle as a right rather than unsustainable greed?

I was interested to discover that the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada have, in their Strategic Directions Statement of 2006, included under Section D the following subsection which refers to environmental sustainability:

Building on the principle of interdependence, actively reach out to those working in the corporate sector, economic development, environmental sustainability, community

infrastructure, education, health and social services to raise awareness of child maltreatment and how people and institutions across disciplines can be involved in child maltreatment response.
(http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/strategicDirections2006_2011.pdf)

This clearly opens the way to bring a range of knowledge and skills together with the potential to deliver services that address not only the protective issues that 'welfare' personnel have as their focus, but also the factors that underpin successful family living — economic and environmental sustainability, education and health.

And in Switzerland another approach to sustainable development and welfare is under way — one in which elements of what we have learnt from past experience of placing young people in small communities and on farms is revisited. In *Farming for Health* (Jan Hassink & Majken van Dijk [eds.] 2006), is an article written by Peter Frey, Susanne Frutig, Urs Kaltenrieder and Jörg Wetzel (pp.213-232) titled 'INTEGRATION: Youth welfare and sustainable development in Switzerland.'

INTEGRATION is a social youth-welfare project with a strong liaison with the economic sector. The well-being of the involved children, adolescents and partner families comes first but with its connections to economic and ecological aspects, INTEGRATION has also become a typical project in the field of sustainable rural development.

INTEGRATION has been operating for some eight years and developed in conjunction with the critical rural issues of small scale agrarian business experienced in the Emmental region of Switzerland. As an effect of the structural change in rural regions, farmers were increasingly dependent on additional incomes. While poverty was high in the Emmental region, it had a multitude of strengths, including an unspoiled landscape, numerous natural resources and strong cultural traditions. Family structures were essentially intact and the social network functioning effectively. The INTEGRATION Project has three key targets:

- to provide space for living and development on a farm with therapeutic, social and educational support for disadvantaged children and adolescents from urban centres such as Berne;
- to offer places for care which create innovative and sustainable supplementary earnings for the farming families in an economically disadvantaged mountain region;
- at the political level, to develop new relationships between 'city' and 'country' by bringing together different cultures and exchanging ideas and experiences.

(http://library.wur.nl/frontis/farming_for_health/16_frey.pdf)

Reading this article I wondered if it were not time to start thinking about similar projects in Australia. And back in Australia, it's not only schools that are playing an important role in educating children and young people and their families about sustainable living. In our work we can develop partnerships with project initiatives such as that in NSW — *Our Environment – a living thing* (http://www.livingthing.net.au/PP_Proj_n4.htm). There are, no doubt, going to be opportunities for innovative projects to develop, but we need to find the energy and commitment to develop new approaches and partnerships. Further, we need to ensure that what we learn is shared with others so that we can both contribute to the knowledge base so necessary for our work, and also carry good ideas into the public arena and impact on social policy.

Finally, before introducing the papers published in this edition, we might take heed of a report recently released by the Australian Council of Social Services titled:

Ten Essentials to Make Australia Fair Report
http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/1544___10%20Essentials%20Report_Australia%20Fair.pdf

A consultation conducted from June to September 2006 at community meetings and online, found that respondents nominated as their top four issues that contribute to Australia being fair:

- Rights – 86% with 1369 respondents
- Welfare – 84% with 1348 respondents
- Education – 80% with 1283 respondents
- Environment – 80% with 1282 respondents

Wouldn't it be exciting to connect these together and lead the way?

In this edition of the journal there are a number of topics pertinent to the programs currently being delivered in the field. The first paper, authored by Cas O'Neill, explores in depth the nature of 'support'. Human services professionals frequently use the term 'support' to describe the services they deliver, but this is a deceptively simplistic word for a complex concept. This article clearly articulates, analyses and resynthesises the behaviours that constitute support in a manner that will contribute to improved understandings of this service. It will also be a valuable article for teaching purposes.

In the second paper titled 'Being 'child centred' in child protection: What does it mean?', Gail Winkworth and Morag McArthur challenge the ease with which we talk of our work being 'child-centred'. Their study of the issue of child-centredness identified four key themes – the importance of: recognising critical time frames in childhood and adolescence; taking into account the developmental needs of children and young people in all practice contexts; providing children and young people with appropriate opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them; and promoting a collaborative approach to influencing children's multiple environments. The principles articulated in this article will resonate with those working in the field and are clearly applicable to case planning, case management, evaluation of outcomes and QA processes.

Adoption as a means for providing children with long-term, stable care is the topic of the article contributed by Patricia Hansen and Frank Ainsworth. Through consideration of the statistical data available in Australia, England and the United States, it is clear that Australia does not currently favour adoption as an outcome for children in care, while other countries have increased their rates of adoption. With the provision of long-term care and permanency planning an issue, this now seldom discussed topic is timely.

Finally, the development of the Innovation Projects is one area of work that is taking up time and energy across the State of Victoria at present. This is a Department of Human Services funded initiative and Peter Clout, Sue Clout, Jenny Apps and Jacinta Cook provide an overview of one of the Pilot Projects delivered in partnership in the Ballarat region with a focus on what has been learnt by the Project staff. This paper not only shares some of the core findings based on Ballarat Family Services experiences, but will also no doubt serve as an historical account of how the Innovation Projects evolved through the Pilot phase. Reading this paper reminded me of how much we have come to depend on the oral history of services and their development, and how much we can 'lose' with staff and programs sometimes in place for comparatively short periods.

This being the final edition of the journal for 2006, I send the compliments of the season to all those who have been involved with *Children Australia* this year, and I look forward to your continued support in 2007.

Jennifer Lehmann

*Season's greetings to all our readers
and best wishes for a safe and peaceful year in 2007*

Children Australia is a refereed journal – all papers submitted are peer reviewed to assess their suitability for publication. However, at the discretion of the editor, papers which have not been reviewed are published from time to time. In order to clarify which articles have been reviewed and which have not, we now include a symbol at the end of each article as follows: ■ = peer reviewed article □ = non-reviewed article