

# Reviews

## WONDERFUL YOU

and

## CARS 'R' US

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*Wonderful You* (2005) and *Cars 'R' Us* (2006) are beautifully presented, colourful, full-gloss card sets that are instantly appealing. As has become the custom of Innovative Resources, both these tools include explanatory booklets containing background information and ideas for using the cards to promote positive outcomes when working with clients. The thought and preparation put into these productions is clearly evident and both are likely to attract the interest of children and young people who would quickly engage with the energy and vibrancy of the illustrations. I found both products visually attractive and imagine that parents, carers, teachers and human service professionals, in general, would do so too.

### Wonderful You

*Wonderful You* recognises the importance of positive regard and feedback in children's lives. Developed from Mundy Fox's original concept of combining letters of the alphabet with alliteration to say 'well done', this card set conveys a sense of fun and quirky humour. The whole resource has that sense of 'aliveness' that is so essential for impact. From 'Absolutely astounding, I'm astonished, announced the awestruck astronaut' to 'Zippity-do-dah, zinged the zookeeper with zest', there is a constant sense of encouragement and recognition of achievement. The cards celebrate the richness of language and dialogue in the process of giving affirmation.

There are some obvious uses for these cards, and parents and caregivers have no doubt already discovered some of these in the year since its publication. I would have loved to return home from school to find one of these cards in my 'special drawer', or tacked to my bedroom door in recognition of completing a chore or managing to keep my bedroom tidy for a whole week! However, there are some less obvious uses for these cards too. In groupwork with people of all ages, the cards provide a means for group members to convey appreciation to one another when finding the words is difficult. Sharing the cards to celebrate a team accomplishment may also provide positive reinforcement when the going is tough.

These cards have the ability to bring playfulness to the serious business of achieving goals when facing difficult

circumstances in one's life. Children and young people tend to expect adults in professional and carer roles to be solemn; immersed in the serious and weighty deliberations of overcoming adversity. This may elicit reactions to counsellors, teachers and others in the 'helping roles' that range from withdrawal to apparent disregard. But here we have a tool that brings humanity to the process of dialogue and change — and the development of relationships; an element of fun in the face of achieving small steps, often over a long period.

The cards may also provide an opportunity for evaluation — to discover what has been achieved in a session. The card could become a marker of where things are up to in the journey through individual therapy, or indeed in small group support programs. When resuming for the subsequent session, the card can be referred to, the achievement remembered, and review encouraged before moving on to tackle the next issue or part of the process. In addition, an exchange of cards would ensure mutuality of evaluation by choosing a card to acknowledge what the counsellor has achieved as well the client. Feedback is so often one way in helping relationships, but we are all in need of recognising what works well.

I also thought of how impersonal so many of our counselling and meeting rooms are in this age of dove-grey and chrome furnishings. Wouldn't it be fun to enter the room and immediately see the card that represents the achievements of the last session — so much more inviting to see some symbol of having been here before and having legitimacy in the space. And there are no difficulties of confidentiality when using a card; it is a private way of knowing and having a right to be there. And what about in rehabilitative and other long-term processes? The child or young person collects the set! Each week over six months a card could be chosen that represents the little steps being made until there is a frieze on the wall at home, or around the bed. I can see this being useful in paediatric wards, used in rehabilitation wards by occupational therapists, or by nursing staff and medicos.

My two reservations about the use of *Wonderful You* concern, firstly, the potential for 'overuse' of the tool by adults who have a limited repertoire when it comes to giving praise and, secondly, the sensitivity of children to inappropriate or over-effusive praise. I have noticed that children who are inclined to set high standards for themselves are quick to play down adult recognition if the adult's expectations are thought to be too low. However, used judiciously and with a 'lighter hand', differences in the awarding of value to achievement could be avoided.

## Cars 'R' Us

*Cars 'R' Us* is a more complex and sophisticated product. While some quite straightforward applications are evident — for instance, discussing the feelings associated with the choice of a 'Fleet' card — this is actually an important therapeutic resource for professional interventions. Developed by Ivan Honey, and embedded in Glasser's Reality Therapy and Choice Theory, I found this set of cards thought-provoking. A single card was deceptively simple and yet initiated a stream of reflection as I considered elements of the illustration and the reasons I had chosen that *particular one from the set*.

There are several parts to *Cars 'R' Us*. The explanatory booklet comes as an Owner's Manual and the complete *Cars 'R' Us* Kit includes 52 'Fleet' Cards, 16 'Know Your Vehicle' Cards, 10 'Thinking Bubbles' and a 'Journey Planner'. The 'write-on — wipe off' idea for the 'Journey Planner' is a particularly clever one and allows re-use and re-thinking. How many of us start out on a journey and then want to make a change of direction? How wonderful to be able to wipe away one's first attempt and start over!

The metaphor of the car for investigating and encouraging dialogue about the complex contributing factors to one's life and well being is consistent throughout the set and suggested applications. The parts of the car — brake, rear vision mirror, steering wheel, etc. — become metaphors for aspects of our lives; acting as a means for understanding our behaviour, the ways we see our lives unfolding, and the direction in which we are looking as we journey through life. But this tool never steps away from the principle that it is our life, our journey and our reality as we take charge, not of others, but of our own actions. Hence, there is also attention to choices and consequences.

One aspect I found particularly useful was the idea that the front wheels in the car metaphor are the 'Thinking' and 'Acting' elements of our behaviour, while the back wheels are the emotional 'Feeling' and physical 'Body' feelings that underpin our thinking and actions. This is an elegant way to break up the components of behaviour and identify where there might be changes that would lead to improved outcomes.

In many human service contexts there is a dearth of resource material for using with boys and men, so this resource is a welcome addition to the professional toolkit; though it certainly doesn't exclude girls and women because of its universality. However, I suspect it would be important for this tool to be studied in depth before applying it with clients. The multiple parts to this resource and the interweaving strands of dialogue elicited in using the tool suggest to me that familiarity with the components would be essential. It is also a resource that probably needs a fair bit of space to be spread out and is certainly ideal for when sitting alongside a client at a medium-sized table. This is so much better than sitting opposite or on pseudo-comfortable lounge chairs in an office setting. It enables a sense of travelling together and being able to make choices about oneself and the changes to which one aspires without feeling eye-balled.

I look forward to trialling both these tools in teaching of social work students in the coming year and to hearing their responses as trainee professionals and travellers through the complex issues of human service delivery.

Reviewed by:

Dr Jennifer Lehmann  
La Trobe University