

## Book reviews

### GROUP CARE PRACTICE WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REVISITED

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This volume, published simultaneously as journal articles in *Child & Youth Services* Volume 27 (Nos. 1 & 2 in 2005) and Volume 28 (Nos. 1 & 2 in 2006), revisits a range of issues that concern the sector by re-publishing work from the 1980s. Authors from Canada, UK, USA and Australia have reviewed their earlier writing – adding, in most cases, additional commentaries on the specific issues they addressed some twenty years ago. This assists in the presentation of the volume as pertinent to contemporary issues in the child and youth residential care sector. The Editors suggest there have been some significant changes, but also a marked lack of change in some areas over the two decades. And there are, indeed, some very concerning issues that have not yet been addressed in spite of the affluence of western nations that this book is thus able to highlight. One of these is the marked failure to develop training for people working in residential care with children and young people, even though this disadvantaged group is currently providing some of the most complex and demanding cases for human service workers.

The Preface by Mark Krueger acknowledges some of the recent shifts in programming and service delivery including re-structuring of services, the need for greater collaboration and flexibility, for innovation, and for greater impact on existing policy. This is followed, in the first chapter by the Editors, with discussion of some of the key concepts and ideas that are impacting on contemporary thinking about out-of-home care for children and young people. In the final chapter the Editors take their discussion further, providing a useful commentary on the state of group care in the face of current issues in westernised countries.

However, the updating of the chapters is 'mixed', with some authors making a considerable attempt to include recent studies in the field and using work completed since 2000, while others have not. This means some chapters refer only to work that is now a quarter of a century old and this has led to the volume, overall, having some limitations. While the information and knowledge base remains sound, and the work has historical significance, it would be difficult to use the book as a contemporary text at the tertiary level. This is because in the delivery of training courses the current emphasis tends to be on material that has immediate application in contemporary policy and practice contexts. In addition, there are—in Australia at least—some important

developments that are not mentioned, one of these being the Looking After Children initiative which is now used extensively in a number of countries.

While a number of chapters in the book point to factors that continue to be relevant in today's context, there are some that are clearly outdated. For instance, the chapter that includes discussion of costs of care is one that has little to offer in debates about current program allocations. There is also now extensive use of data bases, heightened concern about managing risk, and a trend to the delivery of services in partnerships that would have been timely to address in terms of how these might impact on group care. I was looking for guidance on the nature of group care that might best meet needs of current clients and support arguments with those developing policy and new program directions for appropriate standards and approaches.

However, having made these more critical comments, I must admit to finding the book readable and a reminder of all the many facets of group care that need to be considered if children and young people are to have their needs adequately met. The benefit of publishing such papers in a collection is evident as, in this busy life we lead, not many people get regular or easy access to journals unless they are enrolled in university courses or employed in agencies dedicated to professional development. With group care not the 'fashion' in Australia, it is all too easy to forget that many human service workers have, over time, committed themselves to providing services of the highest standards in the face of great difficulties. And these difficulties have been, at least in part, due to the negative attitudes held about residential care services and the pervasive belief that abuse and group care go hand in hand. This is patently not the case, as is well known by those who have closely studied and/or have substantial experience in this field of practice, but it is not easy to convince others that group care can be a viable option if properly resourced.

*Group Care Practice with Children and Young People Revisited* will be a useful adjunct to any understanding of residential care issues and should be purchased by academic libraries and organisations in the business of providing residential services to this group of clients. The Editors have spent their lives dedicated to developing a thorough knowledge base that I suspect will become increasingly essential in the decades to come as our use of foster care becomes even more problematic and we are forced to revisit a more balanced continuum of options for looking after the vulnerable and disadvantaged children in our societies.

Reviewed by:

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