

Welcome to this Special Edition addressing residential care—one of the out-of-home care options for children and young people that is again under debate, though for different reasons in the contemporary care scene.

In compiling the articles and commentaries for this edition, the memories of my own involvement in this form of care were acute. Gone now are the huge institutions to which I was directed to send young children from Allambie Reception Centre back in the 1970s—and thank goodness for that. My recollections of visits to the major orphanages in Victoria remain vivid. Those rows of beds with pale pink or blue candlewick bedspreads, and the stuffed toy on each pillow that was clearly unused and unloved, are still haunting. The indelible picture in my mind of the wary or blank eyes of children in survival mode being confronted with yet more strangers is unforgettable. Yet there were residential models that offered much more to children who might otherwise have had an even less optimal childhood. The many smaller family group homes and residential units have had some success, some providing much needed respite in times of crisis to local families when not all placements involved child protection. Many of the children from these smaller homes formed lasting relationships with staff and remained members of their community without the stigma of being a ‘home kid’.

While there are many accounts of the deprivations, cruelty and downright abuse of children in residential care, there are also stories, told on reflection, of achievement. It was my privilege to unexpectedly hear one of these recently whilst out walking my dogs. The middle-aged man, who I met at the park when he admired my dogs, asked me what I did and I told him I was a social worker. His face grew animated. He had recently returned to a children’s institution to seek out his records, he told me; a decision that had taken much deliberation. He had been seeking a photo he remembered being taken while wearing his favourite jumper—and he could describe it vividly. It was with delight that he told me how the photo had been found after a search through old records and how that had given him the confidence to enquire further about the people he had known. Though I was growing cold at the time, I didn’t stop his reminiscences and asked him about his life in care, which he was clearly eager to tell me about. To my surprise, he described his mother as having done her very best to ensure that his upbringing included education and discipline, and for this she had turned to the Catholics. She had been abused and abandoned with two boys to rear and had to take work that involved long hours of domestic duties, just in order to survive. On her



monthly weekend off she had the boys at home, but the rest of the time they lived in one of Victoria’s oldest orphanages.

But what about the privations and the discipline, I asked him, willing to listen to memories that were likely to be distressing, but intuitively knowing he wanted to continue his story. He looked a little surprised. There was discipline, he explained, but everyone knew the rules and the consequences of breaking them. It was fair; the same for everyone if you got caught. And in life you need discipline, he

continued, proudly telling me that if it wasn’t for the discipline he had had instilled at the orphanage, he might not be the man he was today. And there seemed to be the joys of achievement too, as he explained how the children had worked to save up money to get a television and how much everyone had enjoyed watching it once it arrived. There is much to tell of this man’s life and perhaps one day he will find a way to share it with others. Meanwhile, he works hard and cares for his now aged and frail mother of whom he speaks in the warmest of tones.

This edition explores some of the contemporary thinking about residential care and the judicious use of this form of care for young people. In the light of foster care being increasingly hard to access, perhaps primarily due to the many lifestyle changes of the last couple of decades, there is again attention being given to models of group care. And given, at least in Victoria, that some children under care orders appear to be finding their way into expensive private boarding schools, it seems that there may well need to be a resurgence of funding to provide a more appropriate range of alternatives for those unable to live with their families or kin. The many placements in foster care that some young people are experiencing also suggest that we need to re-think the nature of the care needs of these disadvantaged children and young people; and the range of responses needed to address their vulnerabilities.

There have always been residential care units in the UK, as well as foster care, for children and young people with decisions made on the basis of assessments and care plans. David Lane, who has a longstanding interest in the care of children and young people in the UK, has generously provided a short commentary on his thoughts about young people in residential care especially for this edition. David is currently the Editor of Children Webmag <www.childrenwebmag.com> – a site well worth visiting – and he has assisted us also in gaining permission for a paper by Richard Clough, OBE, to be re-published in this edition. I would like to extend special thanks to David and to Richard for their contributions, which have brought an international flavour to the deliberations on residential care.

Others, too, have contributed commentary on aspects of residential care. Lisa Hillan, Programs Manager, Save the Children Australia, Queensland Division, and Chair Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia, has provided a short paper that reflects on her visit to the UK, Canada and USA on a Churchill Fellowship, and her ideas for the future of residential care in Australia. In addition, Helen Burt and Nick Halfpenny of MacKillop Family Services, Melbourne, have developed a paper that addresses a specific model of long-term residential care that is proving successful. This paper highlights the importance of continuity of care and the need to be able to provide unique responses to young people's needs. Its focus on current practice is an important addition to the debates of the moment.

The major articles of this edition are provided by Howard Bath, and by Frank Ainsworth and Patricia Hansen. Howard and Frank are, of course, particularly well known in Australia for their work in this field of practice. Howard's papers—which are published here in two parts—address the issues that are likely to influence the development of residential care services into the future, exploring trends over recent decades and the imperative for developing a more needs-based approach to service delivery. Part I concludes with a review of recent calls for the development of therapeutic or treatment-orientated models and an overview of some of the initial steps in this direction that have been taken around the country. Part II continues the discussion about the development of residential care services in Australia. It contains a review of some of the recent literature on residential care from Australia, the UK, Canada and the USA; and concludes with a look at the major themes and issues that emerge from this literature as well as the service trends and developments canvassed in Part I.

The final paper presented in this edition is by Frank Ainsworth and Patricia Hansen who are primarily concerned with the failure of group homes as a form of residential care, in their Queensland and NSW iterations, due to the quality of the care described. Their concerns lie in the nature of the care being provided and the staffing of small group home units which has proved to be unstable. Arguing for group care to be well planned and for admission to be for therapeutic purposes, Ainsworth and Hansen decry the tendency for these units to be used as emergency accommodation for a mix of

the most difficult young people whose needs continue to be unmet whilst they are further exposed to destabilising influences.

It is with pleasure that we report that Howard Bath, who has been a very long-term supporter of *Children Australia*, was recently appointed to the position of Children's Commissioner in the Northern Territory. With the developments of recent months in that Territory, there will be much for Howard to consider as he takes up his new role. However, his knowledge and skills in relation to children and young people and their needs will no doubt be invaluable, and it is with the warmest of wishes that we congratulate Howard on this appointment, and wish him every success. Sadly for us, this means that he has resigned from his position as ACT representative on our Editorial Board. We have benefited from his commitment to the journal for many years, and we are grateful for his assurance that he will continue to support *Children Australia* in any way he can. We greatly appreciate the contribution he has made as an Editorial Board member.

In concluding this editorial, it is my pleasure to again welcome a new member to our Editorial Board. In the last edition, I welcomed Julian Pocock, Executive Officer of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), whose introduction is expanded in our Board Bulletin on page 4. This time I would like to extend a special welcome to Dr Nicola Taylor who is a Senior Research Fellow with the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago in New Zealand. Nicola has also provided a short biography for the Board Bulletin, and has already assisted the editorial staff with reviewing material during the first weeks of her involvement with the journal. The New Zealand link is an important one because of the history of exchange between our two countries and many similarities in the work being undertaken with children and young people. Links with New Zealand colleagues having encompassed training, workshops and conferences over the years, we thought it time to develop the link for *Children Australia* as well.

Jennifer Lehmann

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