

child-focussed social work practice. This is particularly important in the field of child protection. Although the authors explained the difficulty of interviewing children of families participating in the study, this should have been represented as a significant limitation for the research data. A reader should reasonably expect to read about children's views as well as those of parents in a book describing 'family experiences'. Thus, 'parent experiences' might better reflect the nature of the research data presented in this book.

A further implication of not representing the views of children is the inability of the research to acknowledge the reality of the harm experienced by children in families affected by domestic violence and/or parental substance abuse. By interviewing only adults, the book describes only the harm as perceived by adults, thus giving an incomplete picture.

Although the research was not particularly novel, the book details a number of insights into the complexities of child abuse in a violent and/or drug affected environment. It highlights the importance of developing and formalising policy, and facilitating agencies to work together in an effort to alleviate some of the problems affecting these families. This is an issue that also needs to be addressed in Australia. The book is a worthwhile addition to the library as it consolidates existing knowledge in this field by example. It also highlights the need for effective social work practice in managing the issues facing these complex families. It does, however, need to be read with its limitations in mind.

REVIEWED BY

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THE OTHER SIDE OF BLUE: WHAT WE LEARN THROUGH OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Michael Colling (editor)
Finch Publishing, Lane Cover, NSW, 2007.

It is hard not to feel emotional when reading the collection of stories in Michael Colling's book *The other side of blue: What we learn through overcoming adversity*, not just because of the sadness expressed by the writers, but because of the incredible resilience shown by the individuals who share their stories. The book presents twenty stories, collected by Michael Colling, about individuals who have overcome adversity. Ten men and eleven women (one of the stories is co-written) write their own stories, in their own words, about a difficult time in their lives. Colling, in his Introduction, indicates that they were mostly in their twenties or thirties at the time of writing, and he presents each story as a different chapter in the book.

Of course, what 'adversity' is, exactly, is different for each of us and hence is different for each of the writers in this book. Some of their experiences include depression, bullying, drug use, family and domestic violence, living with a family member with a mental illness, cancer, isolation, loss (of ability, friends, family), adoption, 'coming out' and racism. Though the stories are in many ways unique to each writer, common themes emerge including loneliness, isolation, confusion, lack of understanding, just surviving, being different and feeling shame.

I came to the conclusion that if I died everything would be good, happy and pleasant, and moreover, no-one would care. There are no words that can actually describe how broken and hurt I felt (Tina, Chapter 16, p.127).

These stories focus not just on the experience of adversity, but also on how the writers overcame their difficulties, and some tell of what they learned along the way. Sharing their stories with others was an important part of the journey for most of the writers, including sharing what they found useful and the turning points in their lives. For many it was actually asking for, and receiving, help that was the turning point. However, for some, the 'help' they needed didn't always come when first requested and, in fact, many were let down by those we are told, as children, are there to help us; for instance, teachers, family, friends, parents, counsellors, social workers and police. When the 'right' person did listen, and did 'help', a turning point was initiated.

It is worth asking for help and making the effort (Pru, Chapter 2, p.17).

For others it was the support of family and friends that they found most useful, and many gave credit to certain individuals for helping them work through their difficulties like 'Cris' (Chapter 15) who encourages anyone facing adversity to 'find their friends and hold on to them like gold' (p.122).

Some of the key discoveries made by these individuals included that they were 'not alone', that they were 'not useless' or 'stupid', that they had reason to be 'proud' of who they were and their achievements, and that 'life is worth living'.

After getting through that difficult stage in my life, I'm now happy and proud to be who I am (Kate, Chapter 14, p.115).

What struck me about this collection of stories is how remarkable, yet unremarkable, these individuals are. They have had experiences similar to those of so many people in the community, with several of the stories reminding me of clients I have worked with over the years. And, like the contributors to this book, they also managed to overcome their adversities and learn more about themselves and their world along the way. It is the 'unremarkableness' of the stories that will enable many people to relate to these stories in some way.

For family and friends of people experiencing any difficulty in life, this book will provide some reassurance of the significance of their role, and perhaps provide some comfort that they are not alone in facing challenges. There are also references to support groups that friends and families have found useful contained throughout the book.

Professionals working with individuals and families will also find this book useful. It is a wonderful reminder of the resilience of individuals and the significance of the work we do. The experiences of the individuals in the book also highlight some of the ongoing issues with the systems and structures of society (education, health, police) and, in addition, provide some information about what did or didn't work for the individuals when they approached professionals.

The stories in the book could also be used with individuals experiencing difficulties, be it with bullying, experiencing racism or struggling with identity. However, the timing of, and purpose for, using this book would be critical. While all the writers have, for the most part, faced and overcome their adversity, many acknowledge that at times they didn't think this possible. My experience when working with people in similar situations is that hearing that 'it will be all right' or 'you will get through it' (which are some of the themes in this book) can further exacerbate feelings of despair, reinforcing self doubts and fears. At the same time, however, the key themes that come through about not being alone, that there are people there to help and that the journey through adversity doesn't have to be a lone journey, could act as 'turning points' for some people.

This might also be a useful text for students in the later years of secondary education where many of the 'challenges' in life are being faced in relation to identity and relationships.

Michael Colling indicates in the Introduction that he has two aims for the book:

- 1) to highlight and celebrate the resilience of each of the contributors, and
- 2) to highlight the richness of the diversity of people in our community.

He achieves both of these with ease. I look forward to the second book and the documentary that Michael Colling has planned.

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STORYCATCHING

John Holton (author) and Ray Bowler (illustrator and designer)

St Luke's Innovative Resources, Bendigo, 2008.

<www.innovativeresources.org>

We all tell stories; to others and to ourselves. Some stories get repeated many times, some remain locked away in our hearts and minds, and some come together through painful struggles. And then there are those that slip so easily from the tongue; and the *Storycatching* cards cannot but elicit those stories whether or not they become shared tales. Sitting beside a respected colleague, Karen, at the launch of *Storycatching*, and asked to use the story card left on my seat, I heard myself: 'Gosh, this reminds me of the time ...' Karen smiled. Already a story was forming on her lips too.

Such is the impact of the *Storycatching* card set. And yet this is, in many ways, a quite different tool to others produced by Innovative Resources. Firstly, the set of eighty illustrated cards are presented in a simple, sturdy box, and are not much bigger than the average set of playing cards. They lend themselves to shuffling! Secondly, they are not overtly of a therapeutic nature and, thirdly, the illustrations are of real objects—simple, everyday objects—photographed and embellished with quirky pen sketching that give the objects life and movement. The words on the cards, never more than half-a-dozen and mostly only one or two, are hand-written, but what they evoke are myriad possibilities in terms of meaning. This quality is probably the most notable to my mind, as it gives a breadth and depth to the cards which, in turn, extend their use.

Clearly, the cards can be used to create conversations and to prompt the telling of stories. However, they also have an inherent attractiveness that draws on emotions and memories. This renders them valuable not only to those of us who want to write stories and need unblocking, but as a therapeutic tool to those who find it easier to speak through the cards. With no overt connection to any particular age