

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.

REVIEWED BY

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### STORYCATCHING

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

St Luke's Innovative Resources, Bendigo, 2008.

<[www.innovativeresources.org](http://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

group, one of the benefits of the *Storycatching* cards is that they can be interpreted by anyone able to recognise or relate to the picture.

The versatility of this product was brought home to me when using it recently with a mixed age group of students. I wanted them to experience the challenge of incorporating apparently unrelated information into an already established 'story'. The purpose of this exercise was to demonstrate some of the elements of working in complex environments. The students sat in groups of four and I gave each person three *Storycatching* cards at random from the pack. The cards were placed face down on the table and each student was allowed to pick only one of their three unseen cards. Using the card they had picked up, the students were asked to tell a story to their small group. This was easily accomplished. They were then asked to pick up their two remaining cards and tell the story again in such a way as to include all three cards. This was, of course, a little more difficult. The students reported back on their reactions—they found the task more complex and more challenging; they felt uncertain about how to proceed, but they also had a heightened sense of competency once the task had been successfully achieved.

The class had been learning about the implications of climate change and aspects of complexity theory—apparently unrelated to the telling of stories—but *Storycatching* proved an ideal and enjoyable tool for demonstrating the cognitive and emotional responses similar to those in confronting the non-linear complexity we are facing in today's world.

And so to a few words about the author and illustrator/designer of *Storycatching*. Both are well-known in their own fields, of course. John Holton is a short story writer, poet and teacher with a gentle and lyrical style to all he does. His acute perception of the human condition is embedded in his work and his insights are always present. Ray Bowler has a long-established relationship with Innovative Resources. Melbourne-based, Ray is described as having a 'love of all things found, quirky, and kitsch' and in this collaboration, the benefits of this shine through.

Finally, apart from all the serious uses of this recent addition to the Innovative Resources toolbox, *Storycatching* is just plain fun. I have never quite got around to putting my set away!

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ONE DAY CONFERENCE

## **SURVIVING 'CARE'**

Towards a meaningful process of healing in NSW

3 October 2008

Paddington RSL, 226 Oxford Street, Sydney

This one day conference seeks to bring together a number of individuals, groups and organisations concerned with establishing a meaningful process of healing for survivors of care. Building on the 2004 Senate Inquiry report, *Forgotten Australians*, the conference is aimed at facilitating discussion on how the NSW State Government can respond effectively to the abuse, neglect and cruelty experienced by thousands of children in orphanages, children's homes and out-of-home care homes over the past few decades.

Presented by the Bellingen Institute and supported by Southern Cross University, Centre for Peace and Social Justice, Care Leavers Australia Network, Historical Abuse Network and Paddington RSL Club.

Tickets can be purchased from Bellingen Institute Inc, PO Box 104, Bellingen, NSW 2454

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