

Book Reviews

NEWPIN: COURAGE TO CHANGE TOGETHER HELPING FAMILIES ACHIEVE GENERATIONAL CHANGE

Linda Mondy and Dr Stephen Mondy (Eds.)
UnitingCare Burnside, Parramatta, Australia, 2008.

The first decade of Newpin in Australia: From theory to lived experience

Early intervention has a long history, with an impressive literature on the efficacy of a range of approaches to addressing the consequences of family disadvantage and/or dysfunction for children (Hayes 2007a, 2007b). Increasingly, the focus is on how interventions early in life can break cycles of intergenerational transmission of the effects of disadvantage and the impacts of dysfunctional parenting (Hayes 2006). Such interventions are an important aspect of contemporary approaches to addressing poverty, child abuse and neglect, drug and alcohol misuse, and involvement in criminality—the broad set of problems that often contribute to social exclusion (Frazer & Marlier 2007). Key issues in the literature relate to the duration of prevention and early intervention efforts and how this is associated with whether their benefits are sustained or not (Hayes 2007a). Arguably, many short-duration programs have short-term impacts, but their longer term efficacy to overcome intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and dysfunction is debatable.

Newpin (New Parent Infant Network), first established in the UK in 1982, is distinguished from other intervention approaches by its focus on multiple components delivered with greater intensity over a longer period than many other initiatives. The program develops supportive, non-judgemental, non-hierarchical communities of support within which mothers (and, more recently, fathers) can address the residues of their own negative experiences in childhood and see how these influence their feelings and actions in relation to their children. As such, it goes beyond the typical parameters of parent education and support to address some of the entrenched emotional, attitudinal and behavioural impediments to effective and empathetic parenting. The objective of Newpin is to improve the quality of relationships between parents and children in ways that reduce risk and vulnerability and enhance protection and resilience. The focus has tended to be on those who are at risk of parenting problems.

On the tenth anniversary of the introduction of Newpin to Australia, it is fitting that UnitingCare Burnside has published a very valuable volume capturing the insights of program designers, staff, volunteers and, most importantly, parents from a diverse range of backgrounds who have participated in Newpin. The chapters provide very detailed insights into the principles and approaches to practice that are at the heart of Newpin and that distinguish it so clearly from other parent education and support programs. As such, it provides a rich picture of how Newpin works, its essential features and the challenges that may be encountered in its

implementation. Particularly valuable are the chapters outlining how Newpin was initially developed in the UK, extended to Northern Ireland, and established in six centres in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania, operated by UnitingCare Burnside, Bethany Community Support and Northern Newpin respectively.

Although some material has been derived from earlier publications, and there is some overlap of content across chapters, these do not detract from the value of the volume. The book provides particularly useful insights into the extent of the impacts that it has had on parents and their children. It contains information on the evaluation of its effectiveness, including the results of a randomised control trial of the Newpin Antenatal and Postnatal Project that demonstrated the efficacy of Newpin in reducing the occurrence of maternal depression.

In addition to the research and evaluation data, it is the personal stories of life change in the face of considerable challenge that speak most compellingly of the value of Newpin. These show how the sustained commitment of volunteer 'befrienders' and program staff can assist troubled parents to confront their inner concerns and outer challenges in a way that liberates them from the burden of the past and enables them to address oppressive factors in the present to embrace the prospect of more hopeful futures for them and their children.

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