

Welcome to the first issue of the *Children Australia* journal for 2010. The year is already well underway as you read this editorial and the articles that follow; and already much has happened concerning children, young people and their families, both here in Australia and abroad. Of note has been the Apology to child migrants by Gordon Brown, Prime Minister in the UK, on 24<sup>th</sup> February this year. A brief look at the website dedicated to the Child Migration program and its aftermath is salutary (Child Migrants Trust, <http://www.childmigrantstrust.com/our-work/child-migration-history>).



For those who are not familiar with the details, it has been established that some 130,000 children between the ages of 3 and 14 years were sent to countries of the British Commonwealth between 1618 and 1970—this being the last year that children were received in Australia. Stephen Constantine (<http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/welfare/articles/constantines.html>) provides an overview of the policies and partnerships between government and charitable organisations that led to the maintenance of the program, the beginnings of which were associated with sending children to Richmond, Virginia, in the USA. The child migrant program itself, its extent and far-reaching consequences, together with the lack of transparency and the covering up that has gone on, is of great concern. What has become obvious from records accessed in recent years is that the facilities for receiving and providing care for child migrants were not all of a suitable standard ([http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/publications/research\\_guides/guides/childmig/pages/chapter3/e.htm](http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/publications/research_guides/guides/childmig/pages/chapter3/e.htm)) and this was known both in Britain and by Australian charitable staff at the time. However, in spite of lack of care and absence of amenities such as floor coverings, classrooms and other basic requirements, the program was allowed to continue. The disruption to young lives, the abuse and cruelty meted out to many of the children, and the subsequent trauma that resulted in lifelong disadvantage for many, are at last formally acknowledged.

However, this whole episode raises in my mind the question of how we ensure that similar sub-standard care is not continuing in the current child care system. The business of receiving reports about children, investigating, supporting, providing care and taking responsibility for children and young people is highly complex. There are those who are concerned about the lack of consistent care provided, the dearth of options available to children and young people, the amount of time spent in keeping records and attending meetings, and the limited specialist interventions that are now more often needed due to the compound disadvantage and disruption many young people have endured prior to entering the care system. There is no easy answer, of course, but it has been suggested that stronger attention to the care and development of children in the early years may serve to

prevent some of the difficulties that later emerge and defy resolution. And one wonders if a return to a more localised system of integrated responses to children through childcare, kinders and schools might serve to identify children at risk and engage their parents/carers more actively at a much earlier stage.

An event also of international significance is International Women's Day (IWD) – 8<sup>th</sup> March – which is now officially celebrated as a holiday in China, Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus,

Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, with a growing tradition that sees men honouring their mothers, wives, girlfriends, colleagues, etc. with flowers and small gifts. In some countries, IWD has the equivalent status of Mother's Day where children give small presents to their mothers and grandmothers (<http://oiaustralia.com/international-womens-day-2010-8th-march/>). It is clear that 8<sup>th</sup> March is becoming an important date on the calendar of many countries, but there is still much to be done to raise women's status, and the day doesn't carry this level of regard in Australian culture. Continuing to be of concern, both in Australia and globally, is the lack of representation of women. The United Nations theme this year – *Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all* – has drawn attention to the range of issues still faced by women and, consequently, the children for whom they care. As the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, stated:

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to the global mission of the United Nations to achieve equal rights and dignity for all ... But equality for women and girls is also an economic and social imperative. Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals — peace, security, sustainable development — stand in jeopardy (<http://www.un.org/en/events/women/iwd/2010/>).

Returning to the home front, and another ongoing issue, it seems we are yet to attend to anomalies in our Family Court system which continues to overlook injustices to children due to confidentiality policies and practices in mediation services. A number of key figures, including the Chief Justice of the Family Court, Diana Bryant, the former Chief Justice of the Family Court and now honorary professorial fellow at Melbourne University, Alistair Nicholson, and Emeritus Professor Dr Freda Briggs in South Australia, are calling for an alteration to the law to enable important matters relating to the welfare of a child disclosed in mediation to be admissible as evidence (*The Age*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2010). While there continues to be opposition to taking this step, it is becoming increasingly evident that some of the current confidentiality practices are getting in the way of ensuring safety for children. As Alistair Nicholson points out, children are often the subject of mediation processes and subsequent court

decisions, but usually don't participate in the very processes that concern their interests. It is always a complex matter to arrive at what is in the best interests of children, but this cannot be achieved when vital information is potentially not available to the Family Court. I wonder what children and young people would say about this situation if we were able to hear their views?

And finally, the Indigenous Literacy Project (<http://www.indigenouseliteracyproject.org.au/>), which started in 2004, is a partnership between the Australian Book Industry and The Fred Hollows Foundation. Funds are raised to purchase and supply books and other culturally appropriate material to remote communities where The Foundation works. This year, Indigenous Literacy Day will be held on Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> September, and the idea is for people to donate books through the Project which are supplied to kinders, childcare centres, schools and other venues where children in remote communities can access these resources and develop their literacy skills. This might be something that your organisation could become involved in, and it would certainly make a very real contribution to improving the educational and literacy standards of those living in remote areas of Australia.

In our first *Board Bulletin* for the year, Chris Goddard, our Editorial Board member for Victoria, has prepared a commentary on what are alarming aspects of the child protection system in that State. While there are constant and complex issues associated with this field of practice, it is worrying that there is no apparent improvement in staffing levels, response times to reports and the completion of thorough planning for children at serious risk of harm. The continued identification of deficits in systemic structures and responses, many of which are not new, suggests it is time for a much deeper review and overhaul of policy and practice in this field.

The *Board Bulletin* is followed by four papers addressing a range of topics concerning children and young people. In the light of debates concerning the Family Court, the paper by Thea Brown, Alison Lundgren, Lisa-Maree Stevens and Jennifer Boadle about children's schooling following separation and divorce will no doubt be of interest. This article is based on a series of studies undertaken by a Monash University research team investigating parents' involvement in their children's schooling following parental separation and divorce. The conclusion is that schools have difficulties managing the issues of children whose parents are separated. There is a need for school staff to be educated about the heightened risks to children whose parents are no longer together and to develop specific policies and programs that can be put in place for these children and young people.

Philip Mendes reports on a study to examine the effectiveness of a leaving care program. The young people involved came from Central Victoria, thus this paper addresses both the features of the program and has relevance to rural and regional contexts of care. The study outcomes supported the importance of ongoing engagement with young people leaving care and highlighted some of the service gaps for those who are most vulnerable.

Paul Delfabbro, Daniel King and James Barber also write on out-of-home care issues, this time discussing foster care through a review of the findings of the South Australian longitudinal study and the extent to which these are borne out in subsequent national and international research. The comparisons drawn out by the authors demonstrate the degree to which out-of-home care issues are shared between westernised nations.

Concluding our articles is the third in the series of four papers authored by Stephen Larmar and Julie Clark, this one titled 'Proactive responses to aggressive behaviours in out-of-home care'. The focus of this paper is on aggressive behaviours in children and adolescents and outlines a working framework to assist carers in responding appropriately to such behaviour within the out-of-home care context.

Finally, we have a book review by Dr Lisa Kettler who has taken the time to consider a new addition to resources for parents managing emotions in children. This book may be a useful addition to the libraries of parents, including foster parents and residential care workers, who are constantly dealing with the emotional aspects of caring for disadvantaged children and young people.

The June issue of *Children Australia* will no doubt interest subscribers as it is a special issue on the topic of out-of-home care for children. It will feature a set of papers drawn from the proceedings of a symposium titled: *Adoption, fostering, permanent care and beyond: Re-thinking policy and practice on out-of-home care for children in Australia*. The Guest Editor for this issue will be Professor Marian Quartly from Monash University, Victoria. *Children Australia* is indebted to Monash University for assisting with the additional costs of bringing our readers this special issue.

And in closing, we continue to encourage you to write, to comment and to send us letters on your thoughts and ideas. In particular, we are seeking papers on topics that include children, young people and disability, the issues of public health in childhood and adolescence, early childhood development, nutrition, learning and alternative approaches to service delivery to children and their families.

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