



BOOK REVIEW

As if I was a Real Boy

Mackenzie, G., & Mackenzie, J. (2011). Publisher: British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), London. Paperback ISBN 978 1 907585 24 1 £8.95.

Dr Jennifer Lehmann, Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, Bendigo Campus

Including a review of this special story of adoption seems appropriate to the topic of social pedagogy — the focus of this issue. Not only is the process of adopting an older child one that involves care and connectedness, establishing inter-relationships and making a commitment to new learning, it is one that requires a holistic approach to development and wellbeing. This small and very readable volume tells the story of Jeannie and Gordon — Gordon whose experiences of loss and disadvantage echo those of most children who come into care, and Jeannie, a single woman who commits to adopting an older child and all that such a decision entails.

The story unfolds with Jeannie and Gordon taking turns as the narrator and using their differing points of view to carry the reader forward from the time of their meeting to Gordon's independent adulthood. The tone is always positive, though the various experiences and challenges each face are difficult and demand re-thinking of established attitudes, ideas and approaches.

The process of being approved for adoption is an arduous one and not for the fainthearted, but Jeannie does not dwell too long on this aspect of the story, focusing instead on her own development as a new parent once Gordon had joined her. One of the strengths of this story is the honesty that comes through in the telling. This captures the reader's interest and makes this book useful to those who are contemplating adoption or permanent care of an older child. While there are many fundamental elements to becoming a parent of an older child that will resonate with adopting parents, Jeannie is quick to stress that her learning, associated specifically with parenting Gordon, will be different to what others will experience with a different child. As a great believer in reading widely, I wouldn't hesitate to encourage prospective adoptive parents to read this narrative as there are many elements of relevance whether adopting a young child, an older child, a relative child or a 'stranger'.

As if I was a Real Boy may also provide a useful starting point for conversation with older children who are being adopted, though it might be a book that needs some degree of filtering through conversations with carers. Gordon's specific issues may not be of such interest to young people who have their own, and different, difficulties to face, but the

more general issues of settling into a new household and establishing oneself in a family and in education might be helpful in initiating discussion within the home. There is certainly much to ponder and question for those children and young people who find reading, and identifying with a character in a story, a way in which to think about their own situation.

I was particularly impressed with the foundational idea that learning is equally important for child and carer and can be achieved through many means, not only formal avenues of learning/teaching such as in schools and training programs. Jeannie is particularly skilled at being able to turn day-to-day events into opportunities from which both she and Gordon can learn. Always, she maintains a confidence in herself and in Gordon which leads to reasonable and usually positive, outcomes from them both. On a more critical note, I felt there was some lack of balance in the narrating with Jeannie having more to say than Gordon, and a tendency towards some schmaltzy commentary in the concluding pages of the story. However, there are some really wonderful passages in this book that could be used in training and discussions with prospective foster parents as well as with those wanting to adopt. The response of Jeannie towards Gordon after he had started a fire springs to mind, as does the business of Gordon not wanting to have Christmas. Another event involves the potential for Gordon to be expelled from school. These might not be the same issues that others face, but involve similar challenges to aspects of discipline, attitudes and rituals. Such events also raise the important issue of needing to advocate for children and young people who have been disadvantaged and who will be potentially more so, if treated as though they were 'normal' within society's institutionalised regimes.

It is always what I call 'deep-breath country' to write about personal experiences, and Jeannie and Gordon are to be commended for taking this step, together with BAAF for publishing their account. I hope it will be a useful tool for those working in the foster care and adoption field, quite apart from its very real interest as a story of human endeavour.



www.

AUSTRALIAN ACADEMIC PRESS
.com.au

NEW RELEASE OUT NOW

The Bravehearts Toolbox

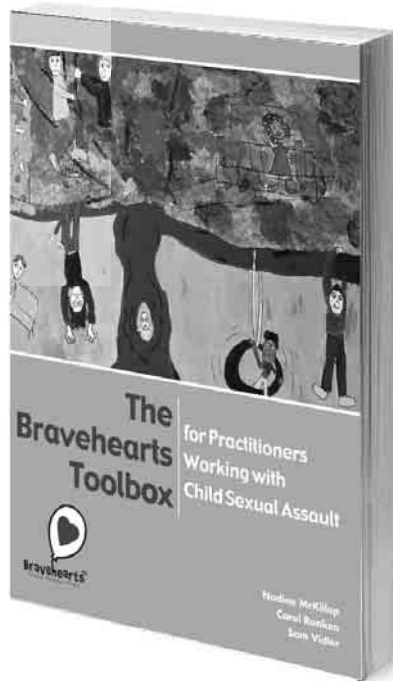
for Practitioners
Working with
Child Sexual Assault

**Nadine McKillop — Carol Ronken
Sam Vidler**

RRP: **\$64.95**

Release Date: 1st **December 2011**

Only available from AAP and Bravehearts



Combining the expertise of both researchers and practitioners specialising in the area of child sexual assault, this book provides an innovative, evidence-based approach to working with children and young people affected by sexual assault. It is an essential guide for general counsellors, school counsellors, psychologists, youth workers, chaplains, mental health practitioners and other allied health professionals, to provide them with the necessary information and skills to support children and young people affected by sexual assault. Its purpose is to build the confidence of these frontline workers and to reassure them that they do in fact possess the necessary skills to continue to work with their client once the issue of sexual assault has been raised.



Bravehearts Inc. is a national, registered charity whose members believe that the provision of effective support and care to children who have been sexually assaulted and their non-offending families, together with effective prevention, early intervention and increased community awareness will provide a fundamental cornerstone necessary to a healthy society.



Buy online
www.aapbooks.com
Knowledge | Behaviour | Discovery