

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Children Australia* for 2012. This year Rachael and I are continuing in our roles as co-editors with the continued support of our editorial consultants, and OzChild staff. However, this year I will be taking long service leave and leaving the journal in the safe hands of Rachael for the months of May and June. This break will give me a chance to travel and I am hoping to meet with a couple of our editorial consultants in New Zealand and Tasmania along the way.

In 2012, Rachael and I hope to broaden the range of topics concerning children, young people and their families, and welcome the submission of papers and enquiries from authors to achieve this goal. You will notice we have already begun this process with the special issue last December on social pedagogy. With a higher number of books and resources being forwarded to us for review, we also hope to have a wider selection of review reports for you. In addition, a special issue is under development for December, 2012, and we look forward to receiving research and practice-related papers on topics associated with family law, the family court, separation/divorce and impacts for children, young people, parenting, education of children and suchlike. Dr Nicola Taylor, Acting Director of the Centre for Research on Children and Families, Otago University, New Zealand has agreed to be the guest editor for this issue.

Maintaining the journal through all facets of its development is no easy task and we rely on the support and willingness of many people for preparing reviews of manuscripts and publications. If you are interested in becoming a reviewer or writing for the journal, we would love to hear from you! But now, before introducing the articles in this issue, I would like to raise awareness of the impacts on children and young people who live with a parent who hoards.

Many human service professionals have come across people who are socially isolated, shun visitors to their homes and accumulate excessive amounts of what appears to be useless items. Some people hoard animals, which causes even greater distress to those charged with the authority to intervene. While there is a growing body of research on hoarding behaviours, and development in our understanding of the differences between compulsive hoarding and chronic disorganisation, there is little research into the impacts of a parent's hoarding on children. Chabaud (2011) is possibly one of the first to have established a research survey tool

online that will assist in accessing a better understanding of the issues children and young people face.

Compulsive hoarding is described as a behaviour in which each of the following three characteristics are present: '(a) the acquisition of, and failure to discard, a large number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value; (b) clutter that precludes activities for which living spaces were designed; and (c) significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding' (Tolin, Frost, & Steketee, 2007, p. 16). Hoarding behaviours may or may not be accompanied by domestic squalor, described by Bratiotis, Schmalisch, and Steketee (2011, p. 219) as 'filthiness or degradation from neglect; can be domestic (in the home) and/or personal (characterized by lack of personal hygiene)'. However, it is likely, if the hoarding has become chronic and severe that domestic squalor will be an additional issue for attention.

Some adult children of hoarders have begun to speak about their experiences — see for instance Scholl's *Dirty Secrets*, accounts of people who have grown up with parents who hoard on the Children of Hoarders Inc. (2006–2011) web site and films such as *My Mother's Garden* (link available from Children of Hoarder's Inc. web site). These accounts are disturbing, with an array of difficulties being experienced by children that are likely to have long-term effects in terms of their emotional and physical health (Frost & Steketee, 2011). Hoarders, themselves, commonly have poor health with high levels of co-morbidity (e.g., diabetes and obesity, high anxiety). Their children are exposed, especially in situations of domestic squalor, to poor hygiene practices, limited diets, infestations (rodents, cockroaches,



etc.) and often poor emotional nurturing and limited social connectedness. As Chabaud (2011) points out, when young, children often live without basic comforts, private space or a normal family life and, when older, 'they become more conscious of their own vulnerability, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, disgust, embarrassment, and social isolation' (p. 4). Children may also struggle academically and emotionally (Tompkins & Hartl, 2009). Under these circumstances, children often hide their parent's behaviour from the outside world by never having friends to visit, while some find refuge in the homes of other people, at school or in outside activities. As many people with chronic hoarding behaviours are highly anxious and likely to become aggressive when challenged about their behaviour, children are often fearful of provoking reactions and often find themselves rejected and abandoned if they take action to change their situation. Many adult children are forced to walk away from parents who refuse to even discuss their behaviour, with concomitant loss of extended family support and intergenerational contact.

Child protection services, the RSPCA, environmental health officers, housing support workers and aged care assessment staff reflect the nature of the professional roles through which contact might be made with households in which hoarding is an issue. However, there is limited understanding of how to assess the severity of the hoarding behaviour and the potential for success in treatment. There is also a substantial literature that urges a team approach when working with hoarding situations and this has led to the development, in Australia, of hoarding task forces and working groups such as the Loddon-Mallee Hoarding Working Group. These initiatives are in the early stages of working to educate community and professional personnel, through conducting workshops and preparing documents such as toolkits for professional practitioners. However, given that severe cases of hoarding in which children under 18 years are present in the household are known to practitioners, it is worrying that there are no groups or support services being developed for this age group.

One of the difficulties is having anecdotal knowledge that children have come from, or are living in, a hoarding household, but not knowing the number of children and young people who have been recognised and noted as such by, for instance, child protection; or through the recording system contributed to by agencies providing out of home care. A second difficulty is that hoarding is not a well recognised problem with sophisticated understanding of its aetiology and impacts through the lifespan of children and young people; while a third issue is that in any one geographical area there may be relatively few children identified as needing assistance so there is no 'critical mass' or significant recognised groups to whom to respond. Clearly, there is a need to alert teaching staff, welfare personnel and child protection staff to the harm that can result from long years of living with a hoarding parent, but also a need to conduct a range of research studies into aspects of child development,

education, emotional wellbeing and other factors associated with children's lives that might be adversely affected by a parent's hoarding. I am hoping an honours student might assist in doing some research on adult children in the Bendigo region, who have grown up with a parent who hoards. Perhaps 2012 will be the year to open up this neglected issue for discussion.

And so to the articles that we present in this issue: The first four articles have, as a theme, working with young people in care to achieve improved outcomes in their wellbeing. Beginning with Cathy Humphrey's article titled 'Permanent Care: Is the Story in the Data?', we look at the challenges of achieving a full picture of the data related to stable, long-term care of children and young people in Australia. Cathy highlights some of the difficulties concerning the data in this article, which is designed to provoke more depth of thinking about such issues as to why Australia has such a low number of permanent care arrangements for those in care. As she so clearly points out, the data is opaque, but leaves one wondering why it is that we have been so poor at gaining permanency for some of the most vulnerable children in Australian society.

The second article is by Philip Mendes who continues the theme of outcomes for young people in out of home care. Philip provides a thorough review of the literature that links out of home care, leaving care and the passage of young people into the juvenile justice system. This is then used as a starting point for a small research project that involved the staff of Whitelion, a youth support organisation, who were encouraged to address the issues associated with young people who became involved with juvenile justice after committing offences. The stability of their care was clearly one aspect affecting offending behaviours, but a number of other factors require more in-depth research, which Philip suggests is urgent if we are to achieve better outcomes for young people leaving care.

Sarah McLean's article follows the theme of out of home care with a specific focus on volatile substance use (VSU). She uses a narrative lens identifying that there are 'social' narratives shared between young people in residential type care that appears associated with VSU. Her conclusion is that more research is required to investigate the nature of adjustments, culturally and otherwise, that might be needed to reduce the prevalence of VSU in young people in out of home care.

Lisa Wood evaluates a program that encouraged young people to engage in drumming as an intervention to improve the social wellbeing of alienated youth. This Western Australian project had some interesting outcomes for young people exhibiting behavioural issues, with the evaluation involving a control group methodology. It has long been accepted that art/music therapy makes an important contribution to wellbeing and this article provides further evidence of this.

Finally, Karen Broadley discusses risk assessments for sex offenders, a topic pertinent to those working with

children and young people who are considered to be at risk of abuse from an adult with whom they live. We so often seek certainty when having to make decisions about the risk to children from parents/carers, and testing for risk is attractive. However, Karen reviews the tools that are currently used for testing, raising doubts about relying on this method of assessment. This is an issue of ongoing importance in the protection of children.

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies

maintains a list of conferences that may be of interest to practitioners working in the child, youth and family sector.

Website: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/conf/confmenu.html?tbm=1>

Conferences of interest in 2012 include:

Early Childhood Conference, 26-27 May, Brisbane, Qld, Australia.

National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Conference, 6-8 June, Fremantle, Western Australia.

Social Media, Bullying and Vulnerability, 14-16 June, Melbourne, Vic, Australia.