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Editorial

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Welcome to the year of 2015. This year celebrates the 40th year of *Children Australia*'s publication, quite an achievement when one thinks of the difficulties in establishing and maintaining a journal – and the many changes that have taken place over that time in the way of technical production and the processes of publication. This year we welcome a number of new international Editorial Consultants from the UK, Norway, Ireland and the USA, and, of course, welcome back our readers and supporters of the journal. I trust you had a safe and peaceful Christmas and New Year, though this is often such a brief interlude that it is easily forgotten amid the busyness of the return to work. For 2015, we plan to have a June Special Issue, and apologise to those of you who expected this current issue to contain the plenary addresses to the International Conference on Innovation in Therapeutic Approaches with Children, Young People and Families. We are hoping that trauma-related papers from the Conference, titled *Childhood trauma – understanding the basis for change and recovery*, will be published in June.

Entering 2015 we also start our fourth year supported by Cambridge University Press. Since our association commenced in 2012 we've increased the number of articles and pages per year by 2014 to more than 40%, and the numbers of papers downloaded has increased five-fold. Early signs for 2015 show this growth looks set to continue. Of no small interest is the span of institutions whose employees use *Children Australia*: we see academic institutions throughout the world, government departments, agencies, and the judiciary. This tangible demonstration that the journal is linking policy, research, and practice is a delight to see, and proof that the research with can make a difference.

You may be interested in the 10 most read papers in 2014.

Issue	Title	Authors
38.4 (2013)	Children and Contact in the Context of Parental Separation and Family Violence: A Practice Perspective	Karen Barker
38.4(2013)	Relocation Following Parental Separation: International Research, Policy and Practice	Nicola Taylor
39.3 (2014)	The Influence of Music Media on Gender Role and Self-identity: Perceptions of Children Aged 6 and 10 years	Lesley-Anne Ey
39.1 (2014)	Adults' Perspectives on Tweens' Capacities: Participation or Protection?	Jonathon Sargeant
38.4 (2013)	I Wish the Views Were Clearer: Children's Wishes and Views in Australian Family Law	Alan Campbell
39.3 (2014)	Are Judges getting the Full Story through Court-ordered Reports and Investigations? A Critical Analysis of the Discourse of Disbelief in an Allegation of Child Sexual Abuse	Pamela D. Schulz
38.4 (2013)	Centralising Children's Needs in Dispute Resolution in Family Violence Cases	Amanda Shea Hart
38.4 (2013)	Parents, Children and Family Relationship Centres: What's Working?	Thea Brown, Alan Campbell
39.2 (2014)	Blurred Lines? Responding to 'Sexting' and Gender-based Violence among Young People	Anastasia Powell, Nicola Henry
39.1 (2014)	"It takes me a little longer to get angry now": Homeless children traumatised by family violence reflect on an animal therapy group	Neerosh Mudaly, Amanda Graham, Nerys Lewis

There have been many global concerns over recent months, not the least being the wars in Syria and Iraq, the continued conflict in the Ukraine, the West African Ebola crisis and various natural disasters. All of these have had, and will continue to have, profound impacts on children, young people, and their families and carers. As countries around the world come to grips with these events, and build alliances in order to respond, I can't help but think, too, of the very local alliances that we engage with for our work and throughout our personal lives. These local alliances greatly affect people caught up in major events, but

they can also be source of surprise or angst at any time when people find their expectations and ideas differ. Think, for example, of the tragic deaths of health workers trying to contain the Ebola crisis. Unexpectedly, they found themselves dealing with a total lack of trust among local residents, who were unable to understand what the health workers were trying achieve and reacted, sadly, with violence.

We get surprises right here in Australia, too, when we encounter people from communities very different from our own. When crises are precipitated by human behaviour, it is sometimes hard to understand how or why particular events have taken place. Recently, for example, the tragic shooting of three members of a family at Logan, near Wedderburn in Victoria, appeared to be the result of 'a minor neighbourhood dispute' that escalated (Minear & Argoon, 2014). The alliances between neighbours living in this agricultural community had clearly been under unsustainable strain. This particular event happened as I was travelling to stay in a similarly small and relatively isolated community in South Australia, one where I had worked and lived many years ago. So, in this editorial, I want to share with you a narrative, rather than academic, discussion about alliances and the nature of community relationships. Over many years, my living and working in rural contexts has brought issues of relationships and boundary setting into sharp relief – phenomena that are common sources of tension throughout worlds of small community living.

Much has been written about professionals living and working in rural and remote areas (for instance, Cheers, 1985; Lehmann, 2005). Just last year, Relationships Australia (2013, paragraphs 1 and 2) shared the follow advice:

> Relationships in rural and remote areas have particular pressures and challenges.
>
> Men, women, children and young people living in rural and regional communities face many pressures that people from cities do not. These include the threat of drought or flooding; fluctuations in the price of rural commodities; isolation; and a lack of access to many goods and services, including relationship support services. Such financial and social pressures often cause stress, which can lead to:
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> - depression
> - relationship breakdown
> - family violence
> - an increased use of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes
> - an increased risk of farm accidents
> - an increased risk of mental illness and suicide.
>
> A lack of educational and employment opportunities in many rural and remote areas of Australia force many young people to move to metropolitan areas. This puts a further burden on those who stay behind.

Organisations delivering services are alerted by Roufeil and Battye (2007, paragraph 11) that the following factors need to be understood:

- community pressure to be 'all things to all people' (CWA/FaCSIA, 2006, p. 11) in the absence of an adequate range of health and welfare services;
- the long time required to foster community acceptance;
- the challenge of managing confidentiality in small communities;
- limited access to other support professionals, especially specialists;
- difficulty recruiting and retaining staff; and
- the limited ability of communities to pay for services.

More recently, there have been papers and reports published relating to the use of technology to overcome rural and remote geographical isolation and the delivery of health and welfare services (for instance, Commonwealth of Australia, 2012; Kildea, Barclay, & Brodie, 2006). However, I was unable to find much written about the inter-relationship issues for residents of small rural communities, although over the years some sociological work has picked up on issues of culture and boundaries, which clearly impact on how people will act when faced with challenging social and environmental circumstances. For example, Cohen (1985) writes:

> The quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further, that they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere. The reality of community in people's experience thus inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols. (p. 16)

Transgressions in commitment to the common body of symbols – in other words, the failure to act according to a community's expectations – create tensions and challenges. It is this issue that I noticed more than ever on my visit back to the small community where I once lived. So let me tell you something of those tensions.

It begins with the existence of multiple relationships in which people might be any of neighbour, family member, friend, employer or holder of position of authority in a committee or organisation. The friend with whom I was staying (let's call him Barry) was neighbour, friend, employee and former business associate of a farmer ('Alec') living nearby, and was clearly unhappy about a recent incident in which damage was done to his trailer. Barry often used the trailer while being employed to do a variety of garden- and farm-related jobs, because it was bigger than that of his neighbour. On completing a day's work, Barry went to collect his trailer from where it was parked and connect it to his vehicle. The previous day some boating gear had been unloaded next to the trailer, but Barry assumed Alec had, by now, put it away. Unfortunately, a sharp object had been left in the long grass and, as he pulled away, a tyre on the trailer struck it and blew out. Inside the house, Alec was having a beer and, in spite of being told of what had happened, left Barry, no longer a young man, to change the tyre and subsequently buy a new one. The cost of the new tyre negated his day's pay!

In the telling of this incident, there was disappointment that the longstanding friendship had failed. Alec had made no offer to assist with the hooking up of the trailer or to unhook it again, nor had he offered to help change the tyre or make some contribution to the cost of replacing it. Making matters worse, Barry lives on a limited income while Alec is extremely wealthy – and holds a low opinion of those less fortunate than himself, which is worsening as he ages. Reflecting on the event, Barry clearly felt that the expectations of friendship and of an employer/employee relationship had been transgressed, along with community expectations of neighbourly assistance. It left Barry to doubt whether Alec would respond in the event of fire or an accident. But there was also a deeper sense of outrage that seemed impossible to resolve, one that grumbled away as other stories of Alec's previous transgressions were told.

Later that day, the difficulties of privacy in the small community became evident as we stopped for petrol. There was Alec, who I knew myself, having once been his neighbour. Barry made it clear that he did not want me to initiate a conversation and gestured to me to wait in the car. But there was no chance of not being seen. As Alec walked past the car I heard him say to the shop owner "He's got a woman in the car!", but Alec studiously avoided looking at me as I sat there ready to give a civil greeting. Barry returned and went to drive away, but it was just too much for me – it seemed excessively rude not to say "Hello". Fortunately, Barry agreed and we backed up and stopped for a brief exchange. I was told afterwards there would be repercussions; it would be all about my visiting and the visit not being disclosed, about the failed effort to avoid contact, about knowledge not shared between neighbours and friends. There will be a next instalment, no doubt.

Of course, additional complications arise when people's children are involved. On the same visit, Barry also described a discussion between neighbours about the ABC series, *The Slap* (Ballou, Bell, Cowell, Mrksa, Shortland, & Tsiolkas, 2011), which had the effect of polarising the local community. Neighbours were gathered for an annual barbeque and the programme, seen by all, was raised in conversation. There were those who thought slapping a child was absolutely wrong and warranted a charge of assault, and those who reckoned the child deserved discipline and the slap was appropriate. The point here is not that opinions were polarised, but that a tacit agreement was made, almost immediately and without being openly articulated, *not to discuss* the topic further after neighbours realised that perspectives were so markedly different. As Barry commented, "When it is clear there could be an argument, the subject is put off-limits."

This is not so surprising, but it reflects another aspect of small community life. Issues of strong difference are frequently not talked about, not resolved. There are boundaries around what can be seen (literally) and discussed, including observations of parental behaviour towards children. People retain their knowledge silently. Thus, neighbours' reporting of abusive behaviours towards children becomes problematic, since the source of such reports is obvious to parents and other community members. Local relationships become tricky and many conversations become difficult, from discussions about the behaviour of children and young people, to matters of responsibility for fencing, stock, fire hazards and management, flood and water management, and myriad other aspects of close community living.

On the other hand, there is seldom suppression of knowledge when it comes to responding to emergencies and I was also told of courageous and generous behaviours. Someone turned on the sprinkler system on Barry's house to save it from fire while he was away; absent owners found their stock had been moved out of the fire's path; and neighbours with firefighting expertise returned after the fire front had past to check for spot fires from embers and smouldering wood – even coming back again in the night.

Returning to the topic of the fatal shooting near Wedderburn, I drove home from my trip mindful of all the things that might have contributed to, or allayed, that event. We often forget the level of tension that builds up between neighbours due to noise, the creation of dust and smoke, use of chemicals and sprays, night reaping and sowing, and other activities that may be detrimental to wellbeing. Our systems are not always clear about rights and responsibilities in this regard, and we certainly don't have the expertise and personnel readily available to deal with and resolve these issues. Those of you who are subjected to drug-related behaviours by neighbours, loud music played through the night, smoke from fires drifting through the house, and other such annoyances will know how difficult it is to broach these issues, let alone to find assistance to resolve them. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that small communities are often quite closed when it comes to dealing with difficult issues. However, as professionals, we need to think again about how we respond to disputes and abuses, and what skills we might need for working with individuals, families and children in small community settings. We need to be able to make judgments about when to step in and when to leave alone, but also accept that there will be mistakes that sometimes have dire consequences. It is in the nature of people to do their best, but we are also so very human.

And so to the content of this issue, and we have a diverse collection of commentaries and papers to present, including an introduction to two of our newly appointed international Editorial Consultants, Anna Gupta and Wynne Korr, which begins this issue.

Three Opinion or Commentary papers follow the introduction of our new Editorial Consultants. The first is written by Margarita Frederico, Steven Muncy, Valdimor Hernandez and Efrenlit Cabbigat, titled: 'Addressing the multidimensional impact of child poverty: A model program in Pasay, Philippines'. This commentary describes a programme that is being run successfully as an integrated and holistic

approach to poverty in a particular area in the Philippines, and the holistic approach will resonate with many practitioners around the world who are concerned about piecemeal approaches. The second commentary is by Annette Jackson, titled: 'From where to where—running away from care'. Addressing the complex reasons for children and young people leaving out-of-home care placements, she raises a number of specific points relating to running to, rather than from, care; and how differently we treat those who are in care compared with those living with their parents. The final commentary is by Frank Ainsworth and Patricia Hansen who have chosen the topic of 'Understanding difficult parental behaviours during a child protection investigation'. This paper discusses alternative perspectives of the hostile behaviours of parents who are involved in child protection investigations, suggesting that caseworkers might find they can develop more efficacious relationships with distressed parents by taking heed of language codes and pain-based responses.

Our commentaries are followed by five research-based papers, as follows. First, a paper by Meredith Kiraly, Julieanne James and Cathy Humphreys – '"It's a family responsibility": Family and cultural connection for Aboriginal children in kinship care' – which reports on a study of kinship carers of Aboriginal children and young people, and support workers. The study found that family and cultural connections were not being assisted by cultural support planning. Indigenous caseworkers described the complexities of facilitating family contact, highlighting good practice as well as dilemmas and shortcomings in culturally sensitive practice.

Our second paper is by Gaye Mitchell, Deborah Absler and Cathy Humphreys who report on Mentoring Mums, a community-based pilot programme that exemplifies a model of volunteer home visiting to vulnerable and socially isolated new mothers and their at-risk infants. An evaluation of the programme found that positive changes for both mothers and their babies had been achieved, providing the rationale for exploration of elements that made the mentoring role effective. In this paper, they write of an exploration through the research question: What do mothers, mentors and workers contribute to the conceptualisation of the mentor role with vulnerable mothers and their infants? She argues that the programme's effectiveness resided in a mentor role which shared primary values of befriending and neighbourliness, rather than in mentors enacting a quasi-professional role. Their conceptualisation of the mentor role is based in theory and practice, seeing mentors as straddling the formal world of service intervention and the informal world of kith and kin.

Renata Porzig has chosen the title of '"Help, not punishment": Moving on from physical punishment of children' for her paper on the issues associated with physical disciplining of children. She argues that, while there are cognitive-behavioural approaches to discipline that are effective, many parents still use physical discipline and Australia is yet to repeal the defence of lawful correction that would prohibit the physical punishment of children.

Another issue of concern to parents and professionals is that of free-to-air broadcasting of sexualised music videos, the topic chosen by Lesley-Anne Ey and Elspeth McInnes. They have specifically investigated music videos accessible to young children that contain sexualised content. With relatively high levels of sexualised content across genres and individual artists promoting overtly sexualised material, the authors' findings indicate a need for a review of the current Australian classification system. Many parents and professionals have been concerned for some time about the exposure of children to sexualised media and this is a contribution to a growing literature on the subject.

To complete this set of research papers, Karen Broadley and Chris Goddard write on the topic, 'A Public Health Approach to Child Protection: Why Data Matters'. Their argument is that in Australia there are no reliable surveillance data, as information is not collected about the characteristics of children (e.g., ethnicity) and parents (e.g., mental illness) reported to child protection services. States and territories each have their own child protection legislation, definitions and data-recording methods, meaning that data are not comparable over time, even though many jurisdictions have introduced new data-recording systems in recent years. Their conclusion is that it is essential to develop a national child protection surveillance data system, because this is the only way to ensure that services are located in areas and targeted towards populations in greatest need; and the only way to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention and intervention activities.

Moving to our Practice-based Commentaries, Joe Tucci, Janise Mitchell, Deb Holmes, Craig Hemsworth and Leonie Hemsworth have developed a paper that outlines the function of the child protection policy in an organisation, the principles for constructing the policy, and provides an example of content for a child protection policy. The authors conclude that, if constructed with heart and sensitivity, a child protection policy can shape and define the very narrative about what the organisation stands for in relation to the safety of children and the responsibilities of adults, in order to fufil the rights of children and young people more broadly.

And, finally, Samantha McMahon, a final-year social work student who completed an interesting placement in the office of a Member of Parliament, had the opportunity to research the issues of child care and early education. In her paper titled 'What can we learn from the child care and early education literature?', Sam has investigated approaches to child care and early education overseas and the benefits these provide, not only on an individual and family level, but also economically.

To close this March issue we have a book review by Frank Ainsworth, who reviews *Flawed Conviction: 'Shaken baby syndrome' and the inertia of injustice* by Deborah Tuerkheimer.

We hope you will find a variety of interesting topics in this issue to stimulate your thinking and to contribute to your practice.

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