

Book Review

Book Reviewed: Rod Plant, *A New Life — An Historical Evaluation of Burnside's Khmer Unaccompanied Minors Resettlement Programme*, Burnside, Sydney, 1988.

Length: 108 pages

*Reviewer: Mr Lew Hess, Social Worker,
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This book records in quite some detail the process involved in developing a culturally sensitive programme for young unaccompanied Cambodian (Khmer) refugees who are resettling in Sydney, Australia.

It details the preparatory work involved from governmental, intergovernmental and community perspectives in commencing the programme, and outlines the development of the programme over a period of time.

Sections focussing on areas such as:

- (i) preparation for resettlement
- (ii) the programme in operation and
- (iii) the results

provide useful description as to the process but perhaps more importantly some analysis of the issues involved.

The chapter on Cambodia and the Refugee Crisis provides useful background and contextual information which helps convey meaning to the programme.

The discussion of methodology identified some interesting issues for further exploration. Rod Plant, the programme leader, was also principal researcher, and his explanation of the rationale for such duality of roles challenges the more traditional 'so called objective evaluation'.

This explanation is as follows:

1. Such a programme was not suited to a traditional objective evaluation.
2. The programme had been dynamically self-evaluating.
3. No-one else was in a position to give as full an account.

For these reasons the researcher identified participant research as the most appropriate mechanism for the evaluation of the programme.

"This view of research as engagement emphasises that the researcher and the researched must be seen as part of the whole; and therefore questions the idea that it is possible to stand outside the research process and evaluate it in any absolute way."

The chapters on Preparation for Resettlement and the Programme in Operation identify some interesting issues of real significance to social workers, teachers and other human service professionals.

More particularly the discussion of the development of a model of care underlines the difficulties embodied in working within a cross

cultural setting.

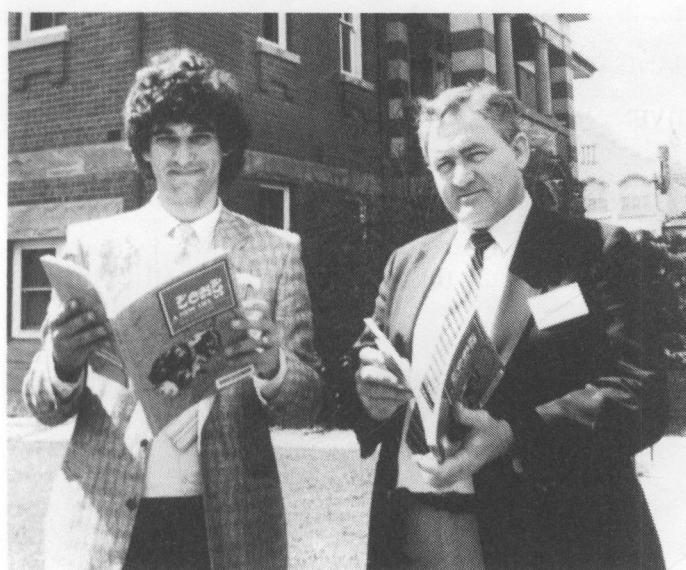
Issues relating to forms of care, cultural realities, staffing (Cambodian and non-Cambodian) etc, are recognised, and would appear to have a wider generic applicability to many situations involving cross cultural practice.

Clearly this book is of real value in adding to the knowledge base concerning work with refugees in particular, but more generally to practice within a cross cultural setting.

Many of the issues identified require a much more rigorous analysis but this comment should not be construed as a criticism but indeed a recognition of the book's contribution in identifying issues and the need for further research.

The author's style is one which lends itself to easy reading and whets one's appetite for further information.

As noted in the preface this is a book which raises many questions — questions relating to the refugee process per se, questions relating to cross cultural social work practice, questions relating to interaction with government departments. It does not provide all the answers, but rather identifies issues and provides an account of how the Burnside programme grappled with such issues in a creative way.



Author of Burnside's A New Life, Mr Rod Plant (left) with Mr Graham Jackson (right), Chief Executive Officer of Burnside admiring the finished product at the book's launch in October.



A young Cambodian dancer performing a traditional dance as part of the proceedings at the launch of Burnside's A New Life.

Burnside — (02) 630 6866. Contact the Public Relations Officer, Enda Roulet, for further information.

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