

element of choice is also an important feature of the Writing Box. The authors compare this to commercial materials available to children which by comparison are prescriptive and inhibitive for experimentation, risk-taking and revision. The Process Writing approach (mentioned above) emphasises revising and editing, as well as the publishing aspect. The Writing Box facilitates all of these elements of the process.

Apart from the Writing Box, there are numerous other ideas including playing with language through story telling, rhymes, riddles and poetry and expressing the imagination through the writing of diaries, stories and newspapers. Inventing words is also advocated as a way of introducing conventions of language. The book also recognises the increasing role of 'writing machines' in the lives of young people and the benefits for language learning that can be derived from an 'open-ended' approach to computers. The authors are discerning about commercial software when they propose an 'electronic writing box': the bulk of children's software emphasises rote, or drill activities. They also promote computer games as beneficial in the learning process. However they do expose the adverse nature of those computer games which portray violence and perpetuate racial and gender stereotypes. They also point out the importance of equity in the classroom for girls who are commonly denied access to (or discouraged from using) computers.

Nevertheless, some of the theory that is espoused by the authors in terms of learning and computers seems contradictory, particularly in relation to some quotations taken from other sources.

Their interpretation of these quotations is somewhat confusing: for example, they provide information which indicates that computer learning requires movement along a pathway from which 'Y' cannot be known without first having discovered 'X'. According to the authors, this contra-indicates 'logical' and 'sequential' patterns of learning while it may be said that it rather emphasises these. Also pertaining to the use of computers in learning is a quotation from Sherry Turkle, who suggests that it is often the electronic medium itself that has the most significant effect on the child (rather than the content of the program). This is somewhat ambiguous: in his critique *The Technological Society* (1964), the French social theorist Jacques Ellul discusses the domination of **technique** as detrimental to the development of human beings. The quotation could therefore be construed as highlighting a negative aspect of computer learning, while it seems that it was included for another reason: to emphasise the potential of the electronic media to enhance the development of literacy in young people.

An issue which the authors recognise as a potential problem that can arise from the application of the approach they promulgate in this publication is that of countering negative and stereotypical ideas. Allowing children free rein in their writing (and reading) activities, in their exploration of the world around them exposes them to themes of violence and discrimination. Edwards and Maloy deal sensitively with this matter by encouraging 'writing against the grain'. Their methods of reinforcing this include modelling appropriate behaviour

and values and challenging negative assumptions through discussion and 'bias-free books.

Kids have all the Write Stuff is an inspiring book and easy to read. It is most suitable for parents and teachers of young children and is resplendent with practical ideas aimed at motivating young children to write. The book sees the role of parents in the development of children's writing as fundamental. For school-age children, the promotion of the link between school and home activities places greater responsibility on parents to participate in the literacy development of their children. The encouragement of writing skills in pre-school children depends even more heavily on parental involvement. The implications for children of parents who are able to spend only limited time with them are not made clear, although the strategies involved are various enough to be adapted to suit specific time constraints. Similarly, the material for the Writing Box do not have to be expensive so parents and teachers with limited resources need not feel that such an exercise is beyond their means.

This is an exciting book that makes a worthwhile contribution to the study of the development of children's writing skills. The concepts on which it is based are dynamic and important for both parents and educators alike. It is concisely written and attractively presented. Overall *Kids have the Write Stuff* is a publication deserving of commendation.

Reviewer:

Jane Owen BA Dip.Ed.

Our voluntary homeless : strategies for change by Sue Green.

Children's Welfare Association of Victoria. Funded by the Ian Potter Foundaton. 1993

Our Voluntary Homeless is a report of research conducted during a three year period connected with the implementation of the Victorian Children's and Young Person's Act 1989. The research set out to examine the workings of the child welfare system as it pertains to young people who are at risk

of becoming homeless or at risk because of homelessness. Its point of departure is the Carney Report, the extensive review of child welfare legislation and practice conducted in 1984. The author asserts that the principles put forward in that report are enduring and provide underpinning for the Act and have been demonstrated as appropriate

to lead services to effective short and long term outcomes. Briefly stated the principles are: that young people in crisis should have voluntary access to services rather than be made the subject of a protective court order; that services should seek to strengthen rather than disrupt family ties; that services should be responsive and flexible in form to

enable them to cater for the needs of young people. The research then uses these principles to explore the performance of the child welfare system from the vantage point of non-government services and concludes that the radical reforms introduced with the Act have inadvertently increased the risk of homelessness for many young people.

The first chapter engages in a discussion of some of the statements in the Carney report under a heading which suggests that they are the principles of good child welfare practice. It suggests that an ecological approach is being used and draws attention to a number of criticisms of aspects of the report made in submissions by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria at the time. It was particularly concerned that provisions for statutory services were spelled out more precisely than those relating to residential care, family support and other community based services. The chapter concludes on the note that the association should endorse the main thrust of the Carney report if it would be implemented as a package.

A census survey of non-government run residential care units, hostel and early adolescent units, adolescent community placement services and youth refuges was conducted in May 1992. The methodology including details of data collection and analysis is described in the second chapter. Responses covered 191 services (80% of the non-government services approached), data included characteristics of 360 young people aged 13-16 (94.5% of all young people in this age group placed in these services). Information was also collected on various service characteristics and fourteen aspects pertinent to the operation of the Children and Young Person's Act.

Chapter three consists of a poignant case study describing the experiences of a father seeking services for his son. A central message is conveyed by the response received on one of his approaches to protective services, 'we are not interested because you are interested' ensuing consequences led to the compounding of the problems of a young person and his family. This story was one of three case studies used to elicit responses from agencies about their approach to dealing with typical situations.

In chapter four some agency responses are examined in relation to issues raised

by the case study. Most services would have referred the case on either because it did not fit their service or where it did there was insufficient capacity to respond. Principal emphasis was given to accommodation with little emphasis on addressing the family conflict or even visiting the family at home. Access to service is difficult to achieve and ultimate access may depend on being accepted into something inappropriate to qualify for any response at all.

Young people in crisis is the emerging term to describe this group who traditionally fall between the child protection system and the system for offenders. Chapter five is an attempt to wrestle with the additional dilemmas posed by their need for service and the implications and interpretations of the new act which reduces the grounds for statutory intervention and its implied obligation to provide service. Coercive court orders to control tearaway behaviour, respond to parental desperation, and deter offending, are not possible for 13-16 year olds, unless it can be shown that significant harm has been suffered or is likely and that parents cannot or will not protect.

Present policy and interpretation falls in the direction of limiting statutory protective service to all but the most extreme cases with multiple difficulties and to expect that young people in crisis will voluntarily obtain services from the non-government sector. The report argues that a substantial reduction in statutory work loads is predicted but that the resource transfers necessary to provide these voluntarily accessed services have not occurred. Chapters six and seven elaborate on this point in relation to the intended process for achieving voluntary access and the question of family participation. There has been a reduction of 47% in the number of young people placed on statutory orders. The data indicates increases in demand for service in the non statutory sector but delay in implementing even interim solutions to the shift in arrangements for alternative accommodation and care. The process of implementing voluntary access has led to a narrow and incomplete service coverage and a failure to meet standards. Further it would appear that a number of young people are inappropriately moving into services intended for the homeless. Chapter seven goes into depth on the question of

strengthening family ties and family participation in service delivery. In spite of a long tradition of lip service to family involvement and family work there have been discontinuities between public and private sector roles which, in the view of some, militate against successful models of direct service in this area. The new provisions appear to muddy these waters even further and the data indicates that, despite a relatively high degree of regular contact between young people and family members, there is an absence of family work in 43% of the sample cases, not to mention some difficulties with the nature and degree of the family work where it was provided. The report argues strongly for improvement in this area and points to some examples of successful family inclusion.

Chapter eight explores the service models in use and is concerned with the extent to which they provide a continuum of care. Overall it argues that the system lacks desirable coherence. Various aspects of structure, operation and criteria for accountability serve to isolate the components from each other and risk fragmenting the service delivered to the young person and family. It can lead to many placements, drift and can 'chart a course to homelessness' for many young people rather than providing continuity of care through a continuum, of services. Services which allow for the inclusion of family and which can be flexible and adapt to the changing circumstances of the young person in his or her social context.

The report contains a large amount of detailed information and ranges through a wide variety of issues likely to be of interest to service planners and providers. Some recommendations are made at the end of each chapter which in general support the principles and intentions of the legislation and point to action needed to overcome the substantial deficits in services for these 13-16 year old young people in crisis. It is constructive and informative research about a necessarily complex topic. Unfortunately, the final product is marred by a significant number of typographical errors which run the risk of distracting the reader from useful content.

Reviewer: Lloyd Owen, editor of Children Australia, is a senior lecturer in Social Work at La Trobe University