

In this thirtieth year of our journal, it is timely to reflect on the efforts of the many unnamed and unrecognised people who have contributed to the field of child, youth and family welfare. Included in this impressive group are those who have received services and railed against, and resisted, the structures and constraints placed upon them — those who have challenged prevailing perspectives and routines, and demanded something better. Also included are the volunteers who have remained faithful in the face of shifting service approaches, extraordinary pressures and often limited supports. And then there are the workers; each endeavouring to fulfil a role whilst bringing to bear the humanity and reasonableness that all activity in this field requires. The pursuit of knowledge for practice, and the remarkable tenacity of those who have sought to bring about improvements, is of profound importance.

Such efforts to improve the lives of children and families experiencing disadvantage is a mark of the civility of any society. But I wonder just how 'civil' western societies really are? In the wake of hurricane Katrina, we saw the poor, mainly Afro-Americans of New Orleans wait for days for assistance in appalling conditions whilst those with the means had long since removed themselves from danger; and we heard the voices of those who don't want the refugees of the hurricane in their backyard. In Australia we continue to be obsessed by the pursuit of wealth and independence, the latter being an impossible concept in reality, but one that appears to be used as a measure of one's human worth. Increasingly, it is locked to the ability to accumulate money — just so long as the source is not Centrelink.

Both the United States and Australia are considered by many as representing high standards of civilisation and yet are prepared to tolerate the increasing gaps between rich and poor, substantial homelessness, and myriad other examples of inhumanity and unreasonableness within their own populations. Most worrying of all is the closed-mindedness to any real critique of the decisions and structures that continue to deny the extent of problems from human to environmental. Back at home the starkness of lack of choice for those without adequate means is contrasted with continued affluence. The student whose child with special needs cannot get after school care to allow her to attend



lectures is a case in point. She tries to prepare herself for employment, depending increasingly on family and friends to help her out, when less than a quarter of the cost of a four wheel drive vehicle would solve the problem altogether. Life is full of such anomalies, but I hope I'll never lose my sense of amazement and outrage at the sheer number of comparatively small things that could be done to alleviate the burdens people face.

Fortunately, we can share the concerns, ideas and achievements generated by our work through *Children Australia*, and in this edition we have included articles, papers and reviews representing contemporary thinking in the field.

Commencing with the theme of structural change and service development, Clare Tilbury's paper tracks the substantial changes made in Queensland following the Forde Inquiry. With major changes to legislative, structural, funding and accountability aspects of child protection in that State, she raises questions about just how much responses to children needing protection have changed. Clare suggests that tensions continue to exist between front end responses to notifications and the long term service needs, for instance family support, that will divert children from systemic abuse of multiple placements and the other harms that too often ensue. One of the dilemmas, it seems, is the tendency of governments to build upon current systems that may well carry forward inherent deficiencies to new arrangements. Perhaps instead we need to question and challenge the conceptual aspects of responses and care for children and to revisit issues of their rights rather than rely on those developed for social contexts now passed into history.

Peter Siminski, Jenny Chalmers and Marilyn McHugh's study of the current profile of foster carers in NSW and projections based on ABS Census data, highlights the concerns of practitioners that the number of people prepared to foster is declining. However, the situation is more complex than at first sight. Of the factors that impact on the capacity to foster, three are of particular interest in this article. These are the increase in women's participation in the labour force, the ageing of the population and the increase in sole parent families. Definite conclusions are

elusive. However, it is clear that wage and regulatory policies that result in women working long hours outside the home will add to existing pressures that make fostering less attractive than in the past.

Anne Butcher's article flows logically from the Siminski et al study, addressing the training and status of foster carers. Her work is drawn from doctoral research in the Mackay Whitsunday Region of Queensland. With foster care probably the primary form of out-of-home care now being used throughout Australia, and concerns about abuse of children and young people whilst in care, this study highlights the need for training and support of foster carers. However, the article goes further, suggesting that a process for nationally accepted qualifications with accredited, competency-based training is required. The professionalisation of foster care will no doubt have its supporters and its critics. However, with the declining number of people coming forward as carers and the costs involved in caring for children with complex needs and challenging behaviours, we may well see governments with

little option; unless alternative approaches can be quickly developed.

In a practice focussed section in this edition, we return to Andrew King and his colleagues' pursuit of improved services for men, particularly fathers, a group often deemed difficult to attract to welfare service participation. This short paper follows an earlier article on the same topic, this time looking specifically at the nature of services that have been most successful in engaging fathers. Using expectations of positive responses from men and proposing a flexible range of options, the core purpose of this paper is to encourage agencies to review their practices in relation to service delivery to men. This will no doubt draw debate from some quarters in terms of the assumed gender differences that drive differences in practice. Responses from both the field and academics will be welcome!

Jennifer Lehmann

ERRATUM

Volume 29 Number 4. pp 4-11: Intensive Family Services in Australia: A 'snapshot', by Lynda Campbell

Our apologies to Dr Lynda Campbell, and those included below, for omitting the acknowledgments accompanying her article, as follows:

This paper was prepared by invitation of, and with the assistance of, the organising committee for the Intensive Family Services 5th National Practice Symposium, Sydney, and a version of it was presented to that Symposium in February 2004. The author acknowledges with thanks the work of Simone Payne and Sarah Jones, two social work students on placement at the Spastic Society of NSW, who conducted and recorded telephone interviews; their supervisor, Christine Castle; and in the early stages, Christine Gibson from Burnside. I thank them, but take responsibility for any flaws in the design, data or interpretation. Thanks are also due to the (largely anonymous) participating agencies.