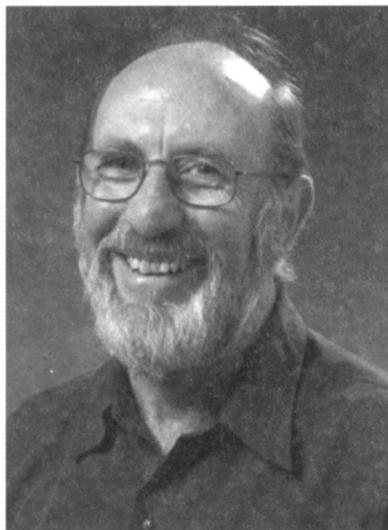


As a journal with a national interest, *Children Australia* seeks to foster communication between researchers and practitioners in child, youth and family welfare in Australia. As 2004 draws to a close, we have been reminded that we have usually attempted to acknowledge our part in the global community and give some attention to the system of 'international years' declared in resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. Accordingly we find ourselves acknowledging that 2004 was declared the International Year of Rice (IYR), largely in recognition that rice is the staple food source for over half the world's population. Interestingly, in Australia there appears to have been little recognition of this international year apart from the rice growers' organisations and a number of school education project sites.



Of course, to dwell on it for more than a moment means being plunged into a pile of dilemmas and philosophical and political contests – contests about trade, global finance, sustainable farming practice, water conservation, poverty and the distribution of wealth. Perhaps that is why Australia was not one of the sponsoring nations of this particular year, choosing instead to promote the National Year of the Built Environment 2004, albeit with an emphasis on sustainable living, including energy and water conservation. This is a useful enterprise, but it would be unfortunate if Australia failed in its support of inclusive and legitimate international bodies such as the United Nations which accord priority to universal human rights and pursue goals which seek to address the needs of oppressed and vulnerable people. The UN General Assembly also declared 2004 as a year to celebrate the historical abolition of slavery. Again it is a group of other nations with histories more closely entwined with the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trading operations who are taking more notice. However, it serves as a reminder to us all of how ordinary people are easily engaged in processes which can have cruel effects on others, and of how ordinary people often fail to act through fear or apathy when harm is being done to others.

How well are our public, private and community institutions in Australia doing in promoting awareness of global humanitarian concerns – in contrast to somewhat self-interested economic viewpoints, competitive philosophies and campaigns which demonise others, foster mistrust and appear to justify various combinations of neglect and punishment of vulnerable populations of disadvantaged and displaced people? The UN warrants our participation in its

processes and our support for all its endeavours. The recently announced proposals for reform point to greater opportunities for the rule of law through democratic processes in the years to come and, hopefully, enhanced capacity to get more timely peacekeeping and humanitarian aid where it is needed. More importantly, the collaborative work of UN agencies and member States on the eight UN Millenium Development Goals will go some way to addressing the imbalance of opportunity for health and well being so evident on the world stage. The UN website (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/) sets out these goals with the targets, implementation strategies and progress to date. In brief they are:

- to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- to achieve universal primary education;
- to promote gender equality and empower women;
- to reduce child mortality;
- to improve maternal health;
- to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- to ensure environmental sustainability; and,
- to develop a global partnership for development.

One of the concerning features of 2004 has been the ease with which world leaders promote the view (while others, in their silence, accede to the notion) that enemies should be 'captured or killed' rather than be 'arrested, given a fair trial, then if found guilty be humanely contained and given opportunities to contemplate and where possible contribute, to restitution'. The struggle toward restorative justice in our local criminal jurisdictions has been long, slow and difficult but very worthwhile. National and international leaders would do well to understand restorative justice – there are, after all, some stunning examples on the world stage, such as South Africa's truth and reconciliation processes.

This year has also seen the release of the first report (another is due this month) of the Australian Senate Inquiry into the institutional care experiences of children and young people. In addition to providing a useful history and overview of care in Australia, it has heightened awareness of the potential for abuse and neglect in care and also points up the valuable contributions of the advocacy organisations we now have in Australia – CLAN, the care leavers of Australia network, and CREATE, the national and state network for children and young people now in care and leaving care. The

report, *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, can be accessed on the web at:

www.apf.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/report/

In this issue of the journal, there is an interesting range of contributions. Lynda Campbell reports on a survey of Intensive Family Services in Australia which provides a useful snapshot, allowing for reflection on the evolution of this service form since *Homebuilders*-style intensive family preservation services were picked up in Australia about 15 years ago.

Damian Killeen, with Jennifer Lehmann, reports on a qualitative study involving seven participants in a BSW Honours project to study non-residential fathers and their support needs. It provides some useful insights into this difficult and relatively neglected topic.

Wayne Daly, Colin McPherson and Lucinda Reck from the Mackay Whitsunday Region in Queensland report on SPLAT (Super Participation Learning Action Team). Billed as a model of young people's participation that moves beyond the rhetoric to empowerment, it demonstrates the excitement and power of involving young users and former users of services in helping us to do better with research, policy and practice.

Julie Hind and Judith Woodland report on a three-year, longitudinal evaluation of the Family Options program for children with disabilities and very high support needs. They followed the progress of ten children, looking at stability of placement, nurturing relationships and quality of life. 'Working together works well' reports on the relationships aspect of the evaluation, exploring the plethora of issues raised for birth families, alternative families and the support systems needed, but often limited in supply, in our community.

The 'Where the action is ...' section in this issue features a short report from Dean Biron of the Queensland Police Service who gives us a glimpse of some important and practical research of cases of infant abusive head trauma. His 'brief communication' about preventing shaking injuries in infants points to the need for education not only of mothers, but also their partners and other prospective carers, in developing strategies to avoid dangerous responses born of frustration and anger in the face of infant crying and inability to settle and feed.

We have included two book reviews in this issue, and these are followed by a somewhat different piece, an interesting historical perspective of out-of-home care in Florence in the Middle Ages, written for us by Caitlyn Lehmann.

Lloyd Owen

Wishing all our readers
Season's Greetings
and
a safe and peaceful
New Year

