

Editorial

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No doubt the mid-year will see academic staff scurrying to complete Semester 1 teaching and marking, and those of you working in the field will be well into the swing of the year and facing a variety of funding issues as the new financial year emerges. The last few years have been difficult in terms of funding for health and community service programmes and, while the focus has been on enquiries into child abuse, mental health assessment of young children, the acute lack of affordable housing and pressures on single parents raising children, the Australian atmosphere, in general, is one of restraint and pulling back from funding of welfare services. This comes at a time when Australia has enjoyed much better financial well-being than many other countries in the world and, ironically, there appears to have been a drop in what the Government refers to as welfare dependency. However, as the population is continuing to increase and we are continuing to experience the economic losses associated with severe weather events and climate change, it seems we are also, as a nation, less inclined to be generous to those who experience ongoing disadvantage. The gap, according to Nicholas Biddle and Maxine Montaigne (2012) of the Australian National University, is not as great as that in the USA – hardly something we would want to emulate—but is still increasing. While on average Australians have experienced an increase in income since the 2006 Census, this is not evenly distributed between states, regions and suburbs. We know that loss of a stable and sufficient income, as in the event of loss of employment, has major impacts on the well-being of family members and this was the message reiterated at the ‘Securing the Future’ Conference held last November. Clearly, we have a long way to go before our services will be able to truly address structural disadvantage.

Having commented on the bigger picture in relation to the well-being of our child, youth and family sector, a second issue that has been in my thoughts recently has been the importance of understanding temperament. What a jump in topic, you will be thinking! But let me explain. The last few months have brought home to me the enduring nature of temperament and how this element of our makeup permeates every stage of our lives. This is because I have engaged

with a number of people entering old age in recent months and have noticed the impacts of temperament on care arrangements and behaviour. Those who were always known to have an easy or average temperament have settled after initial disruption and adjustment into new care arrangements either at home or in an aged care facility. Those who were less able to regulate emotions and attention, and had always had a level of reactivity, have had much greater difficulty in adjusting to the limitations of ageing and have been noncompliant, with a tendency to be unreasonable and ‘difficult’. Not very scientific observations, perhaps, but it has been interesting to see the exaggeration of longstanding tendencies in behaviour demonstrated with family, friends and professional care staff.

All this reminded me of the research undertaken by Margot Prior and her colleagues over several years, which resulted in some interesting new knowledge with the publication of *Pathways from Infancy to Adolescence: Australian temperament project 1983–2000* (Prior, Sanson, Smart & Oberklaid, 2000). In the last decade this work has been continued resulting in a number of articles being published (see <http://www.aifs.gov.au/atp/pubs/index.html>). A report by Smart (2007) highlights the importance of tailoring parenting to the nature of the child and it is this aspect of providing care for children and young people that I can now see is so important if we are to offer kids every opportunity to use their temperament qualities to advantage in their lives. As Smart states: ‘Firstly, it is important for parents and



professionals to recognise that a child's temperament style is not "good" or "bad" on its own, but very much depends on the context and situation' (p. 5). Of course, there are many factors impinging on children's development and it is not easy to take account of all of them. We all seek what Bronfenbrenner (2005) referred to as 'developmental niche' too – a place that is culturally, socially and developmentally comfortable for us – and if removed from where we feel safe and accepted, we can react with rejection and aggression. But if entering our old age means having to make adjustments and adaptations, this makes understanding our temperament and being able to use it to positive effect even more important.

And now to the content of our June Issue of *Children Australia*. There is an interesting mix of topics in this issue along with book reviews; and we begin with a Commentary from Frank Ainsworth and Patricia Hansen, who have also contributed a paper. We then move to the topic of children's education before 'travelling' to WA to consider residential care for Aboriginal children and young people, and finally addressing employment regulation for young people.

Frank Ainsworth is a regular contributor to the journal and in this issue has provided two papers. The first is a commentary paper titled *Behind the Closed Door: A guide and parents' comments on the workings of the New South Wales children's court*. With the exception of the Victorian children's court, all other Australian state and territory children's courts are closed, which means the general public are not privy to the processes and procedures involved in care and protection orders. Frank, along with co-author Patricia Hansen, provides an account of these processes and to some extent the rights and responsibilities of the department and parents during this process. Frank and Patricia share their thoughts on parents' experiences of the court system and recommend a system of compassion and understanding to help ameliorate some of the negative aspects experienced by parents who have a child removed from their care. Frank and Patricia's second contribution raises the important topic of young women in care who become mothers at an early age. The authors suggest that the state has failed in their duty of care by not providing these young people with adequate guidance and reproductive health education. The authors discuss the uneasy paradox found with a select number of young women who were removed from their families to prevent poor outcomes, and yet find themselves in the same position as their parents by having the department remove their own children due to early pregnancy and inadequate knowledge and skills for raising that child.

Lisa DeGregorio and Sarah McLean's paper addresses the issue of poor educational outcomes for children in out of home care. The authors discuss the ways in which children in out of home care often experience educational disadvantage and the systematic factors that contribute to this. The purpose of their paper is to encourage the agencies that work with these young people to design effective ways of improving their educational outcomes, and to highlight the need

for effective ways of monitoring the impact or contribution they make to these children's education.

The following paper is also related to educational outcomes. Ruth Knight has undertaken a preliminary investigation of mentors perceived effectiveness of the Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning programme. The programme connects mentors with children living in out of home care with a view to assisting, encouraging and ultimately improving the literacy skills of these young people who might otherwise fall behind their peers with literacy and educational attainment. The results indicate that positive, long-term relationships between mentor and child are seen as influential at enhancing children's engagement in the programme and improved literacy. Overall the mentors appear to have a positive view of the programme, and we look forward to further evaluations of children's experiences.

Returning to the topic of children and young people in residential care, the fourth paper in this issue is by Kylie Hodgkins, of the West Australian Department for Child Protection, and Frances Crawford and William Budiselik of Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute. It addresses the establishment, principles and operations of 'Yurag-Man-Gu Taam-Purra', the name selected for the residential child care facility at Halls Creek, some 2873 kms from Perth. The name means 'a good place for kids' and the development of this facility recognises the complexities of the 65 Aboriginal communities and 28 languages spoken in the region. Finding a shared pathway for the Indigenous community and white Australian professional staff for the delivery of residential services that are appropriate in this context and meet the requirements of government is no easy feat. This paper describes the approaches taken and underlying principles that support the success of this project.

Frank and Patricia's abovementioned paper 'From the front line: The state as a failed parent' is our fifth paper in this issue and, finally, one by Natalie van der Waarden addressing the regulation of young people's employment takes us in a seldom discussed area of working with children and youth. We are often concerned about exploitation of young people by employers, but it is not often that we are drawn to focus on the complex and varying employment requirements relating to age, safety and nature of work being undertaken. Natalie draws some interesting comparisons between the states in Australia with accompanying recommendations as to how we might improve employment arrangements for young people and their employers, alike.

We conclude this issue with book reviews by Andrew Canon and Sandy Taylor. Andrew reviewed Pamela Schulz's book entitled *Courts and Judges on Trial: Analysing and managing the discourses of disapproval*. Andrew recommends Pamela's book as a scholarly text book as well as a book of general interest for those interested in the nature of media discourses on government and the law, with particular reference to the way in which the media can undermine the legal system and court decisions. Sandy Taylor comments on a number of factors that she found challenging in relation to

Freda Briggs' recent publication and this will be particularly relevant to those who want to recommend books to parents on abuse of children.

Finally, can we remind you all to think about submitting reviews, manuscripts and commentaries to the journal; and note the call for papers for our planned Special Issues this year and in 2014. Perhaps some writing will take hold on the more wintry evenings ahead?

References

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