

Editorial

Susan Gair, Jennifer Lehmann and Rachael Sanders
 Editors, *Children Australia*

Welcome to the final edition of *Children Australia* for 2016. For this edition, I am pleased to be guest co-editor along with regular editors Jennifer Lehmann and Rachael Sanders. Living in rural and remote Australia can bring a high level of satisfaction and many rewards, including a strong caring community, rich, longstanding social relationships, outdoor lifestyle, happy childhood memories and psychological, cultural, spiritual and economic connections to country. Rural living and working can also bring unique challenges including harsh climatic conditions and crises, a tyranny of distance, isolation, family hardships, limited services and infrastructure, reduced education and employment opportunities; and increased risk of mental health issues, family violence and child safety concerns. The demands of providing remote area health, welfare and other professional services include high visibility and trying to 'fit in', managing confidentiality, and dual and inter-relationships. These and other geographical and environmental challenges lead to low workforce retention rates that, in turn, leave significant gaps in service provision for children, families and communities, including Aboriginal communities (Jervis-Tracey et al., 2016; Lehmann, 2015; Robinson, Mares, & Arney, 2016).

Rural and remote health and welfare services, together with those of education, are facing additional challenges with the impacts of constrained funding in a context which increasingly supports business models for all manner of organisations, together with strongly managerial approaches. Technology and communication, whilst better than it has ever been, does not provide an easy answer to service delivery; and with the tendency of metropolitan-based agencies taking up responsibility for services in rural and remote areas there are worrying gaps in maintaining the history, knowledge and understanding of rural culture and relationship patterns. This lack of understanding, in some cases, cuts across established commitments to service delivery in which clients are offered 'on paper' new service choices that fail to maintain the supports found to be beneficial in the past, staff who have always 'gone the extra mile' are told

their 'cottage industry' is at an end, and longstanding, experienced staff are made redundant or leave in the face of what is purported to be contemporary management for greater efficiency and outcomes. Change is inevitable, of course, but many professional practitioners are concerned about the slippage and losses that, ultimately, impact on client outcomes, and wonder at the ever-increasing amount of time spent on computers as opposed to working on the ground with clients.

In spite of the many difficulties, a strong evident theme in this issue of the Journal is working with the strengths of children and families in regional, rural and remote locations. Here, we offer our readers diverse and interesting children-focussed perspectives on living and working in remote, rural and regional locations in Australian and in broader, international contexts.

Before we offer content details of this edition, we acknowledge the passing of Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs a highly respected, influential expert and advocate who spent her career fighting for the protection of children in South Australia and across the world.

In the first article in this edition, the authors Rebekah Grace, Jennifer Bowes, Judith McKay-Tempest, Jodi Burnstein and Sue Tregeagle discuss the development of early parenting education to strengthen Aboriginal parenting in a remote New South Wales. The authors describe the development, piloting and evaluation of a parenting programme delivered to Aboriginal families of young children in a remote region where early childhood resources were very limited. Their evaluation to date points to high parental satisfaction with the programme, and positive changes in the participating families.

In the second article by Bernice Mathisen, Susan Bennett, Christine Lockett, Katherine Beazley, Juanita Howlett, Melinda Charlesworth, Helen Lees and Jaynee Read, the focus is on building children's capacities through early intervention. These authors report on qualitative research that evaluated parents' experiences of a screening programme initiated between health and educational professionals in

Bendigo, Victoria. The purpose of the programme was to improve access to speech pathologists for parents of preschool-aged children, so that speech, language and communication problems in preschool-aged children could be identified, managed and even prevented.

In the next article by Amanda Nickson, Susan Gair and Debra Miles, emerging themes are presented from a qualitative doctoral research study on peer supervision for practitioners in rural and remote Australia. A key conclusion from the study was that peer group supervision does work in supporting, strengthening and sustaining rural and remote workers to perform their everyday professional roles in providing services to families.

In article four, written by Mary Ann Powell, Anne Smith and Nicki Taylor, the focus is on growing up in rural New Zealand. This article reports on a qualitative research study that explored the perspectives and lived experiences of children in a range of New Zealand rural environments. Through participation in interviews, artwork and photographs, children expressed positive views about rural living, such as opportunities for being outdoors and participating in social relationships, confirming a positive discourse of the rural idyll and, importantly, children's agency in complex and sometimes challenging conditions.

In article five, by Dipjyoti Konwar, Vinita Bhargava and Bhanumathi Sharma, the focus is reflecting on growing up in rural Assam (India). Through the eyes of three young women, we see dreams and challenges, both substantial and emotional, and the need for support and guidance to enhance young women's strengths and capacities.

Next are our 'Practice Commentaries'. In the first commentary, authored by Jennifer Cartmel, Kerry Smith and Debbie Miller, professional development for supporting children's social and emotional wellbeing in South-West Queensland is outlined. They used a strengths-based approach to focus on the learning environment, interactions with children and helping children to recognise their strengths and grow their abilities.

The second commentary is by Priscilla Best and Ebony Lambie. This paper explores how to support families, who

are often in a chaotic state of survival, to provide enduring care for their children through their North-West Early Start Therapeutic Support (NESTS) programme delivered by Anglicare Tasmania.

Finally, we have a 'Practice Innovation' article on a new social innovations programme at the University of Melbourne. This article by Sarah Wise outlines the rationale for establishing the Mobilising change Alliance for Better Lives (MABL) programme and describes the processes, principles and solutions generated to improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and adolescents.

Finally, to end this 2016 edition, we have a Book Review on the recently released *Saltwater. An epic fight for justice in the tropics*, authored by Cathy McLennan.

We hope you find this collection inspires your own practice reflection and innovation with children and families in rural, regional and remote locations. There are always challenges to face and new ideas to consider as we contemplate rural practice, research and advocacy, but the rewards of success are considerable.

As we come to the end of 2016, we would like to thank our Editorial Consultants, Guest Editors, all those who willingly gave their time for reviewing manuscripts, and our authors for their suggestions and ideas for articles. A thank you, too, to Gaye Mitchell, OzChild, who supports the journal and its development and to the staff of Cambridge University Press for their support and patience with the editorial processes. Wishing you a safe Christmastide and New Year.

References

- Jervis-Tracey, P., McAuliffe, D., Klieve, H., Chenoweth, L., O' Connor, B., & Stehlik, D. (2016). Negotiated policy spaces: Identifying tensions for rural professionals in delivering their statutory responsibilities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *45*, 123–133.
- Lehmann, J. (2015). Editorial. *Children Australia*, *40*(1), 1–5.
- Robinson, G., Mares, S., & Arney, F. (2016). Continuity, engagement and integration: Early intervention in remote Australian aboriginal communities. *Australian Social Work*, DOI: 10.1080/0312407x.2016.1146315.