

Spring is in the air and many of you will be thinking about getting out into the garden. Those of us in dry areas will be dreaming of more rain and some of us continue to revamp outdoor areas in order to cope with continued dry conditions. But the clear blue skies, crisp mornings and the flash of birds always makes me feel very alive! And part of my 'aliveness' has been due to two interesting weeks in Germany, which I will report on in more detail in our next edition, but suffice to say that a European summer is lush and green—and colourful—in a way I had almost forgotten! However, the academic program and visits kept the small group of us very busy with some particularly fascinating hours spent in a passive building used as a major Community Centre in Nuremberg, meeting a group of young people participating in a youth program for migrant families, the KIZ Centre in Coburg and a disability centre, WEFA, in an outer area of Coburg.

There were challenges, of course, but our student guides from the University of Coburg shepherded us around with skill, attending to translating and introductions. Many people speak English as their second language which made it easier for us—and harder for some of our hosts—and this reminded us of how generally neglectful we are in Australia about learning other languages. One young woman we met spoke German, English, Russian and Italian! The School of Social Work in Coburg encourages those students who have the means, to travel and do their fieldwork overseas, so some of the final year students we met had returned from Ireland, South America and India, amongst other places. And we currently have two of the Coburg Uni students here in Australia, doing their 26 weeks of fieldwork with Community Connections (Vic). These exchanges are not only providing the participants with invaluable experience and understanding of other cultures, but they educate those of us not able to travel through the processes of discussion and reporting back that usually accompanies these occasions.

Back at home there was other news. FICE (International Federation of Educative Communities), represented by David Lane in the UK, is seeking to develop an Australian chapter and anyone interested in this should have a look at the FICE website (<http://www.fice-inter.org/>) and contact David by email ([dcl@davidlane.org](mailto:dcl@davidlane.org)). This connection provides us with opportunities for international connections, research and conference opportunities. The next FICE International Conference will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, in December 2010 ... and I dream of being able to go! David is also the Editor of Children's Webmag, which we have mentioned in earlier editions of this journal, and some Australian work has been published on this site, but for



those who have not yet seen this online publication, the website address is: <http://www.childrenwebmag.com/>.

Other developments in Australia include the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities which is due to report by the end of October. This wide-ranging inquiry will no doubt provide us with recommendations that, if followed, will impact on the disadvantage experienced by many young people whose options are limited.

Presentations at the Australian Social Policy Conference, *An inclusive society? Practicalities and possibilities*, held in July, have been made available on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/>) and feature research that confirms the disadvantage that is observed by practitioners working in drought affected regions and with women who are separated or divorced. And, as this edition goes to print, child protection will be in focus with the announcement and presentation in September of the 5<sup>th</sup> Protecting Children Awards in Victoria and the recipients of the Robin Clark Memorial Awards.

Across the sea in New Zealand, the issue of hitting children as a form of discipline is again in the news. It is just two years since a law was passed in NZ banning smacking as a result of the country being assessed as the third highest nation of 27 developed countries for abuse, neglect and child deaths. Following a recent referendum, it now appears that some 87% of New Zealanders want the law repealed. Inevitably, however, it is the way in which a question is asked that affects the way in which it is answered. Child advocates have identified this and spoken out against the nature of the question which was always likely to attract a 'no' answer. Clearly, the Prime Minister, John Kay, is aware of this issue and, at this stage, is refusing to make any change, though he is reported as noting the response of some 54% of NZ voters who participated in the referendum.

In this edition, we present papers on the diverse topics of child death inquiries, children's participation in policy and research debates, prevention and early intervention programming, managing oppositional behaviours in out-of-home care, reporting suspected child abuse and developments in Australian law, and a mountainboarding program for rural youth.

Firstly, however, we have included an important Commentary—a response by Cathy Humphries and a number of colleagues to the recent Centre for Independent Studies monograph, *Fatally flawed: The child protection crisis in Australia*, and the subsequent ARACY report, *Inverting the pyramid: Enhancing systems for protecting children*, which makes the case for re-balancing service provision to provide

greater resourcing for universal and secondary targeted services for children and families. It is, of course, difficult to avoid the immediate demands and high needs of the most disadvantaged children and young people coming to the notice of child protection authorities. However, the resources needed for universal and early response services have been worryingly diminished, relatively speaking, and yet clearly make an enormous difference in societies in which such funding and program are available. This is an important issue that has slipped from the agenda in recent years and needs revitalising.

Judith Gibbs has been a member of Child Death Inquiry Reviews in Victoria and she writes with sympathy of the need to recognise the impacts of these reviews on practitioners. Her paper focuses on the need to prioritise an understanding of the individual, organisational and systemic factors that influence thinking, feeling and doing in child protection work. Judith argues for inquiries to be constructed and experienced as opportunities for individual and collective learning as, if developed in this way, they have the potential to add value to the whole service system and the practice of frontline workers, along with meeting the need for public accountability.

The development of policy and legislation in relation to child abuse and protection has long provided ground for debate, comparative commentary and evaluation. In the article by Ben Mathews, Chris Goddard, Bob Lonnie, Stephanie Short and Freda Briggs, the recent introduction of legislation in WA regarding the reporting of child sexual abuse provides the focus for discussion. A number of issues are discussed that demonstrate the complexity of enacting legislation and establishing commonality in responding to child sexual abuse. Some of these will be familiar to practitioners, but always new legislation raises issues and concerns that warrant reappraisal.

A paper by David Vicary, Mike Clare, Judy Tennant and Tine Hoult addresses the issue of participation of children and young people—particularly those from disadvantaged groups—in the development of policy and programs. Described in this paper are four Western Australian examples that illustrate the power and value of children's participation. Information drawn from these consultation processes has directly influenced a range of policy and programmatic

domains. However, despite the clear advantages of involving children in policy and program development, there continue to be obstacles to children's participation. One such barrier will require a much needed shift in attitude so that their participation is considered part of 'normal' consultative practices rather than an 'extra'. It is also important not to see consultation with children as being an 'add-on', or subsequent activity, that follows established adult contributions which so easily subsume young people's voices.

Stephen Larmar and Julie Clark have developed a series of papers that address the issue of managing the complex and often difficult behaviours of children and young people in out-of-home care. This is the first of the series and focuses on factors that influence an individual child or young person's behaviour and the formulation of responses. The purpose of this paper is to provide core information to underpin and encourage proactive responses by carers taking account of individual need. Managing challenging behaviours is often fraught with complexities and uncertainties, not the least being the often insufficient information available on which to base management decisions. This article provides a starting point from which to consider responses to children and young people entering care.

Evan Kemp, Candice P. Boyd, Damon Aisbett, Lisa Harvie and Kirra Caldwell have contributed a paper on their study of young men at risk of mental health problems and a mountainboarding program that had significant impacts on their wellbeing. The findings of this study provide preliminary support for the mental health and social gains potentially obtained when rural youth are engaged in an innovative and enjoyable physical activity program that contributes to social connectedness. This follows on from the 'Mentors and mountainboarding' article concerning the development and delivery of this program from the mentors' perspective, published in *Children Australia* 34(2).

Finally, we are very pleased to welcome Dr Sandra Taylor to our Editorial Board as our Tasmanian representative. Dr Taylor is Professor and Head of Social Work at the University of Tasmania, and we look forward to introducing her more fully in the next edition of *Children Australia*.

Jennifer Lehmann

**Children Australia** is a refereed journal – all papers submitted are peer reviewed to assess their suitability for publication. Peer reviewed papers are expected to meet contemporary academic standards. However, at the discretion of the editor, papers which have not been reviewed are published from time to time. Such papers may include: short commentaries on practice issues that are essentially based on observation and experience; reports on program approaches, initiatives or projects that are both short and unreferenced; historical overviews; short papers that respond to a peer reviewed article published in an earlier edition which adds to informed debate or provides an alternative perspective. It is anticipated that no more than one such paper would be included in each issue.

In order to clarify which articles have been reviewed and which have not, we now include a symbol at the end of each article as follows: ■ = peer reviewed article □ = non-reviewed article