

In this issue...

Oz Child welcomes the participation of Penny Armytage and Liz Armitage as guest editors in this edition with its special focus on child protection. We welcome also the opportunity to be associated with the many contributors to the 5th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, *Taking Responsibility - Sharing Solutions*.

Articles in this issue demonstrate the way in which a number of Australian workers and agencies are struggling to come to grips with the dilemmas and demands of this field. Very appropriately, Margaret Yandell and Lesley Hewitt direct attention to the prevention end of the spectrum. Drawing on the literature, they explore the issue of stress in families and its connection to child abuse. A case is made that situational demands in parenting can exceed the supply of personal resources and social supports, adding to the risk of abuse. They go on to argue that timely use of quality day care has been, quoting McKenzie, '...an understated and underutilized vehicle for primary prevention'. The importance of affordable, accessible, non-stigmatising services to be on hand when families need them cannot be overestimated. This need has been recognised to some extent in Victoria recently with the introduction of three new early intervention service models attached to the family support program. - The Early Parenting Day Stay program; Early Parenting in the Home Support project; and the School-Linked Parenting Support project.

In her article about seeing child protection investigations as first interviews, Sharon McCallum from the Northern Territory leaps into a potentially substantial fray about the nature, purpose and conduct of the first visit following a report of child abuse or neglect. It is a hard subject to do justice to as it raises the fundamental problem facing workers - too much or too little intervention. An over reliance on an authoritarian stance and the court process to solve the problem may mean longer term harm. She argues that, while acknowledging real limitations on our knowledge and ability to have answers in many cases, social workers should apply their practice knowledge with an eye to the need for help and long term outcomes. I am reminded of David Thorpe's observations at a recent seminar that a stance of 'how can we help' may be more appropriate than 'can we make a case'. The need to recognise and weigh up risk to the best of our ability is not diminished and the possibility of being pilloried by an unsympathetic press may still push in the direction of defensive practice. Nevertheless, a stance which blends the humanistic and authoritarian elements is sought, and attempts such as this to articulate it, are welcome.

From Queensland, Yvonne Darlington enables us to share the insights of ten women about their experience of sexual abuse as children. A hope is that our better understanding of their feelings, responses and experiences over time may improve the way we work in this area with both children and adults. A profound sense of difference and unworthiness resulting in active social isolation may need to be addressed. As well, an appreciation is needed that the child's overall experience may contain other forms of abuse which raise other factors and perspectives which should be taken into account. Those involved with the child may be so focussed on the sexual abuse that other matters important to the child are overlooked.

From South Australia, Anne Forward suggests a need for us to reframe our perspective of abuse in care. She proposes a paradigm of duty of care to replace 'concepts of individual pathology and deficiency, in-house investigatory responses and tolerance for all but seriously inadequate care for children'. By defining duties and the breach of them, as well as the moral and legal obligations we have to children, a clear picture of those obligations will allow for the better exercise of responsibility [and culpability] at all levels in the organisation.

With an article on physical punishment in child rearing, Peter Boss summarises the arguments and developments around the globe associated with the campaign to end physical punishment of children in Australia [EPOCH]. The physical punishment of children needs to be considered as a form of interpersonal violence, an assault by someone more powerful on someone less powerful. Caring restraint and the 'loving tap' are not the targets of this campaign but cruelty, violence and models of violence are.

Any serious overview of child protection must acknowledge that the majority of cases reported fall into the neglect or emotional jeopardy category. Linda West and Gina O'Donoghue report some of the findings of a forum held to examine the issue of chronic neglect. Again attention is drawn to the need for a spectrum of services, but in this instance, a range of in home services is advocated, to overcome, or possibly substitute for parenting shortfalls. These services would be obtained and coordinated as needed through sound case management and flexible resourcing. Some families lack the support of extended family and friends; some families cannot and will not change. These realities must be acknowledged, but rather than children being removed to other services with the risks attendant on that process, needed services should be brought to children in their home context.

There are also included brief reports on the International Foster Care Conference and the International Youth in Care Network conference both recently held in Bergen, Norway, and some notes from the National and International Case Management conference.

Books reviewed include five booklets on child protection, published by H&CS to assist individuals in the professions involved in the mandatory reporting of child abuse; *Dirty linen should be washed at home* - an examination of the perceptions of Latin American immigrants towards family violence and child abuse; and *Child Protection - messages from research* which is discussed in detail in the guest editorial.

Finally, there is the last of the interviews by Joe Tucci. This time Suzanne Jenkins discusses insights from her work with sexual abuse perpetrators at the Gracewell Clinic.

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