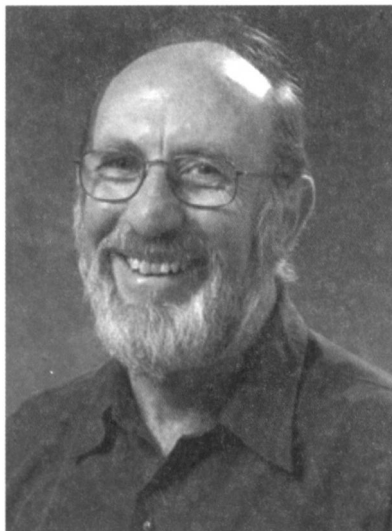


Editorial

Lloyd Owen

The year 2004 brings for this editor another substantial career shift. Retirement from the contract teaching position at La Trobe University has seen some renewed attention to study and research in the territory of troubled and troublesome adolescents and their families. At the same time we are engaged in some hands on work of the same nature in one of our Victorian agencies concerned with preventing and responding to youth homelessness. La Trobe University continues to support some aspects of the editorial function for *Children Australia*, and some guest editorial work will be done this year by other staff members from the School of Social Work and Social Policy.



Return to direct service in the field provides daily evidence of the stresses and strains being felt by many families as well as a variety of hurdles and distractions which litter the pathways of many children and young people. Parents face many competitors for the attention and allegiance of their children. They frequently feel and often are disempowered. Many fall back on attempts to control which were approved in their youth but disallowed now. Failure to negotiate and find a balance or compromise ultimately wears relationships out, bringing rejection and much grief. Negative views and patterns of behaviour established in these processes can then present further challenges for those enlisted to pick up the pieces and take up the caring task, or for the young people themselves trying to survive independently.

The challenge of this work has contributed to some appraisal of parent education programs which have emerged in recent years. Some are concerned with everyday parenting issues while some researchers have given attention to more creative responses to some of the behavioural extremes found in families and residential or home-based care settings. One which has made recent appearance in Australia is the parenting with love and limits program developed by Scott Sells from the Savannah Family Institute. Based on extensive analysis of therapeutic interventions of a strategic and structural nature, it provides a stepped approach to identifying specific problem areas and developing a contract which pays attention to both incentives and sanctions applied to the problem area, with rehearsal and backup strategies for implementation (Sells 2001). Another is the ABC (antecedents, behaviour and consequences) approach, based on the well-established work of Martin Herbert in the UK (Herbert 1997). Both of these approaches are intended for use in families but have equally valid application in both home-based and residential care settings. Another titled ABCD Parenting Young Adolescents, a group program, has been developed by the Victorian Parenting Centre (Cann &

Burke 2002). The development of this program arose from the National Drug Strategy but resulted in a program pitched at fostering a range of parenting strategies likely to foster healthy, across-the-board development. Another approach which seems to have made a substantial Australian contribution is the Triple P Positive Parenting Program developed in Queensland and delivered in packages which vary for age groups and levels of intervention (Sanders & Ralph 2001).

The collection of contributions to this issue touch on these issues in a variety of interesting ways. Jennifer Campbell and Linda Gilmore report the results of some survey research which explores differences in parental attitudes and behaviours

between genders, across generations and according to general levels of educational attainment. One of the aims of the study was to develop a questionnaire to aid further research into the construct of authoritative parenting. It has done this, as well as turning up some interesting results about the nature and evolution of norms about parenting today. Their article, 'Measuring knowledge of child development: Differences between parents according to gender, generation and education', picks up as one of its themes gender differences. In our next article Thelma Paull also raises the gender issue as she reflects on the question, why don't fathers attend parent education programs? The question emerged as a by-product of some other work she was doing in relation to the parenting stress index. It therefore does not gather up the detail of contemporary interest in fatherhood, but her article makes a number of observations which one hopes will encourage attention to the inclusion of fathers in programs and more research on this issue. Linda Mondy and Stephen Mondy tell us about the NEWPIN model of parent education and support which originated in the UK twenty years ago and which is appearing in a number of Australian locations. Its focus is on the early years and, in addition to making reference to local work on NEWPIN, the article briefly examines some of the other parent education and support approaches for this age group as context.

Richard Hil with Charlie Brennan indulges in some critical comment about the way our views are formed about issues of our time and throws up some warnings about assumptions and constructs which find their way into research processes, thereby gaining authority. Being a strong supporter of developmental perspectives and the need for much more longitudinal research, I found this article somewhat confronting. I think the Australian Temperament Project and the attempts to understand behaviours which are regarded as problematic are to be applauded and encouraged. The

warning, though, is serious as labels do appear at times to gather momentum as moral judgments. These in turn find expression as punitive policies and interventions. These are matters for healthy debate and ongoing review rather than acrimony. Hopefully that is the spirit in which such contributions are offered and received. In the last article in this issue, Frank Ainsworth warns us about not taking account of research in adjusting our practice in general, and in replicating programs developed overseas in particular. He argues also for more attention to evaluation research, including some of the newer approaches to dealing with the question, 'what works?' In 'Looking for and replicating model programs for 'at risk' children and families', he suggests that an ethical position demands more attention to the evidence of effectiveness of the models we adopt.

All this surely provides much food for thought, even though it seems to me that practitioners in 2004 are generally hard pressed and frequently being asked to do more with less, and to do it smarter and faster. There are a plethora, perhaps even a confusing array, of strategies, programs and services with targets and standards. It seems to me, though, that a huge amount of effort goes into rationing the public provision of services to those who need help, making them wait, or dreaming up pejorative labels which justify more punitive responses. I noted in the press (*Age*, March 10) an obituary for one of the outstanding criminologists of our time, Professor Norval Morris. His seminal work in 1970, *The Honest Politician's Guide to Crime Control* (Chicago University Press), challenged then some punitive orthodoxies and invited many rational reforms. One would have to say the response, including a significant backlash in the USA where incarceration has had a sustained popular run for offenders at least, has been rather patchy and often contrary to the evidence.

Our book reviews draw attention to two areas, child sexual abuse and leaving care, where evidence of need is well established but service reform and extension in Australia have been limited and slow. Also included in this issue is one of Jennifer Lehmann's thought-provoking short stories.

Lloyd Owen

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CAN YOU HELP?

As part of a reciprocal arrangement, we receive from Hungary a child and family welfare journal, written in Hungarian.

We are looking for someone who has an interest in child and family welfare who might be able to assist with translation from Hungarian into English on a volunteer basis.

If you are interested in offering assistance, please contact Lloyd Owen
(l.owen@latrobe.edu.au)

ERRATUM

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'Challenges posed by kinship care: A study focussing on New South Wales', by Leonie Gibbons and Jan Mason, p.12.

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