

Christmas is almost upon us again as the year slips to a close, and at this time I always find myself reviewing events and wondering what more could have been achieved. In looking back over the year from the *Children Australia* perspective, we have achieved a good deal: a special edition on the future of residential care in Australia; the welcome addition to the Editorial Board of Julian Pocock from SNAICC, Dr Diana Boswell from The Thomas Wright Institute in ACT, and Dr Nicola Taylor from the University of Otago in New Zealand; and we have formed stronger links to our counterparts in the UK as well as New Zealand.



We recently held our annual *Children Australia* review and planning meeting to develop ideas for the journal for 2009. Amongst the more urgent tasks, we need to find an Editorial Board representative from Tasmania, which has been unrepresented for some time now. On a positive note, we have slightly increased our subscription base, and we have maintained the high standard of the journal, which continues to be the only one of its kind in Australia. This is in no small part due to the contributors, reviewers and editorial staff who contribute their commitment and energy to each edition. A special thanks to all who joined in the effort for 2008!

However, due to the nature of the submitted articles, we have become aware of some topic biases, and in 2009 we will be making an effort to redress the balance. We will be looking for authors interested in writing on subjects such as family support, parenting education, e-technology and its impact on the lives of children, domestic violence, children with disabilities, children and public health/prescribed drugs/dental health, and education/life opportunities for children. Therefore, if you know of anyone working in any of these fields, please encourage them to put pen to paper and submit an article or practice commentary.

The past year – especially in the light of recent events – has seen many people concerned about environmental issues, the economic situation and Australia's health and educational systems. It is hard to avoid being anxious about water scarcity and its particular impacts on rural and regional communities, and even more difficult to avoid being worried about the increased number of natural disasters and the swelling number of children reported to child protection authorities. Many people in our sector are concerned about the lack of preventative support services, including the lack of respite services.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) *Report Card: The Wellbeing of Young Australians*, which can be found at http://www.aracy.org.au/AM/Common/pdf/report_card/report_card_A5_web.pdf, does not auger well for our children and young people in the years

to come. The information provided offers an 'international perspective and sets a baseline for future monitoring of the wellbeing of young people' with attention to eight domains affecting the health and wellbeing of young people. These are: material wellbeing, health and safety, education, training and employment, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, subjective wellbeing, participation and environment (ARACY 2008).

An issue of particular concern is that deprivation has grown worse since the last Report Card, particularly for Indigenous Australian children and young people. Infant mortality for Indigenous people is double the rate of non-Indigenous Australians and birth weights for Indigenous babies are the lowest in the OECD. Additionally, immunisation rates of Indigenous Australians have fallen since 2005. It also appears that family relationships are weaker in Australia than in other OECD countries with only about 50% of children and young people saying they spend time 'just talking' with their parents.

It is also reported that 'The prevalence of obesity in Australian children and young people is among the highest in the world and is also increasing at one of the fastest rates' and 'Road death is the main cause of hospitalisation and death of young people' (ARACY 2008, p. 12). And, in referring to young people and their connections to juvenile justice systems, it is clear that far more young Indigenous Australians are subject to juvenile justice orders, with the rate many times that of non-Indigenous Australians

When it comes to climate change and environmental issues, 'Australia is not performing as well as the best international results for any of the indicators in this domain. We have the third worst greenhouse gas emissions out of 30 OECD countries for which data are available' (ARACY 2008, p. 18). The report also includes the comment that 'Research has shown that children have a high level of anxiety about climate change. Australia is one of the worst performing countries in the OECD in terms of greenhouse gas emissions per capita. In terms of biodiversity, 13% of bird species in Australia are threatened with extinction (equal 6th with 4 other countries)' (ARACY 2008, p. 18).

ARACY will hold a national conference in Melbourne in September 2009 focusing on the role of primary prevention in helping address issues affecting young Australians. The conference will provide a forum for individuals and organisations to share their knowledge and experience in developing collaborative primary prevention solutions to complex problems that impact on the wellbeing of Australian children and young people.

We have noted a number of conferences and events planned for 2009 which may be of interest to our readers. National Youth Week 2009 runs from 28 March to 5 April and information is available at <<http://www.youthweek.com.au/>>. There is also the Australian Festival for Young People – Come Out 2009, which is Australia’s largest festival for young people. It runs from 18 to 30 May with a much-anticipated celebration of dance, circus, theatre, music, visual arts, cultural events and more for the whole family. The ISPCAN Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect will take place on 15-18 November in Perth, WA, with the theme *Looking at child abuse and neglect through the lens of prevention*. Other conferences concerning sexual assault and violence can be located on the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault website <<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/conferences.html>>. There is a Disability Studies Conference on 26-27 June at the University of NSW in Sydney; while the AFDO Conference of 2008 – *Policy for Us, About Us! A Practical Revolution in the Lives of People with D* – will now be held on 1 May 2009 at the Telstra Dome in Melbourne (www.ideas.org.au/plugins/eventsmanager/). Of course there are many more events that will take place over the year, but this provides a small sample to whet appetites.

The contents of this final edition of the Journal for 2008 provide an interesting mix of papers and the reproduction of a poster to catch your attention. Gail Winkworth and Morag McArthur discuss the delivery of services from the school base, an idea which has been around for some time now, but which is also subject to a variety of difficulties. In their paper, they report on the ACT ‘Schools as Communities Program’ which has demonstrated a range of positive social and educational outcomes for vulnerable children, young people, their families, their schools and their local communities. The authors argue for the expansion of human services in schools as a means of creating inclusiveness.

Moving to the topic of the increase in children and young people being admitted to care, Patricia Hansen and Frank Ainsworth use the NSW situation to explore the factors that have driven the increase in demand for care. There are family, systemic, legal and political factors at play and these are identified in the article which concludes that a focus on early intervention and prevention, together with high level family support services which are available on a continuous basis

throughout a family’s child rearing years, are vital aspects for consideration.

A poster developed by Maria Murray and Menka Tsantefski of the Odyssey Institute of Studies forms the centrefold of this edition. The poster addresses issues concerning therapeutic groups for children of parents involved in substance abuse, and provides an interesting insight into specific aspects of group therapy. This is followed by a paper that offers further exploration of therapeutic approaches, in this case the development of a therapeutic care team for fostered children whose mothers are in prison. Using a case study, Catherine Flynn and Jenny Lawlor discuss how the impacts of parental incarceration can be managed and minimised for the children involved.

Rhiannon Bruce and Philip Mendes discuss ‘Young people, prostitution and state out-of-home care’ in an article that draws on the views of a group of child welfare professionals in Victoria. The findings of their study suggest there is a complex interaction between pre-care and in-care factors. Further, it is suggested that environmental and systemic factors within residential care may contribute to prostitution, including peer influences, older males, drug use, staffing factors, poor provision of sex and relationship education, placement decisions, and social isolation. The authors identify some significant implications for policy and service delivery. And also on the topic of children in care, Kate Gaffney explores what she describes as common misconceptions about the historic abuse of children in Victoria during the mid-twentieth century, including those contained in the 2006 official Victorian Government apology to state wards. This paper will be of interest to those who have more recently entered the field.

In closing, *Children Australia* wishes you and your families a safe and peaceful Christmas and New Year, and we look forward to your support in 2009.

Jennifer Lehmann

REFERENCE

- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (2008) *Report card: The wellbeing of young Australians*, <http://www.aracy.org.au/AM/Common/pdf/report_card/report_card_A5_web.pdf>.

Children Australia is a refereed journal – all papers submitted are peer reviewed to assess their suitability for publication. However, at the discretion of the editor, papers which have not been reviewed are published from time to time. In order to clarify which articles have been reviewed and which have not, a symbol is included at the end of each article as follows: ■ = peer reviewed article □ = non-reviewed article