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# Editorial

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This special issue of the *Queensland Review* is devoted to exploring the conceptual and practical implications of bold new Queensland research on youth development programs that has genuine global relevance. The articles in this issue, from leading and emerging Australian and international scholars and practitioners, explore and unfold the different dimensions of this Queensland research for an Australian and global audience of youth researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and general readers. By bringing scholars together with paid and volunteer practitioners to contribute to this special issue, *Queensland Review* takes a unique approach to exploring youth programs. The independent practitioner voice — especially the volunteer practitioner voice — is largely absent from the scholarly forum, and this issue brings aspects of practitioners' anecdotal and evidential work to the fore. The articles enable practitioners to share with us how they experience and understand their work with young people, other practitioners and communities. Overall, the scholarly and practitioner contributors to this issue of *Queensland Review* explore key questions and challenges inherent in the work adults do with children and young adults in youth programs designed to foster their positive development.

In the first article, I provide a broad exploration of the thematic youth program practice framework on which each of the authors in this issue was invited to reflect. This new good practice framework, developed through the Queensland Youth Development Research Project (YDRP), illustrates the conceptual application of a strength-based approach to youth development and advocates for the explicit recognition of a diversity of needs and contributions. The framework is supported by six principles focusing on the themes of learning and development; leadership and decision-making; an inclusive ethos; community service; partnerships and networking; and ethical promotion. Taken together, the principles presented here embody an innovative, comprehensive and comprehensible framework for volunteer and paid youth practitioners, service providers and youth studies scholars.

Rod Adam and Denis O'Brien provide international insights into some of the practical challenges facing the sustainability of predominantly volunteer youth organisations and programs. Adam's article uses his experience in the Boys' Brigade and the Queensland Youth Alliance to explore the main issues for Australian volunteers in supporting the delivery of youth programs. It touches on the reasons why people volunteer in the first place, what community support and resourcing are available and the difficulties of running a program with too few volunteers. O'Brien discusses how outcomes for young people are mediated through and depend upon the suitability, availability, knowledge and skills of volunteers. In exploring the value of the positive interactions between volunteers and young people, and

the role of volunteers in increasing young people's connectedness to community, O'Brien argues that the work of the leading Irish youth development organisation Foróige would be diminished significantly without adult volunteers. Importantly, both articles highlight the importance of role and outcome satisfaction in sustaining adult volunteer participation.

The articles from Robyn Gibbs, Kevin Mehmet and Chris Howell, and Marion Minis illustrate how striving for good practice leads to change. All three articles show how program innovation and evolution, while maintaining a program's core features, are necessary to meet the needs and to sustain the participation of children and adults over time. Gibbs explores the question of adult volunteer satisfaction through the lens of education and outlines the significant changes implemented to their volunteer education framework by Girl Guides Australia following a large-scale organisational review. She suggests modern volunteering requires changes to the ways in which organisational relationships are managed and supported, and a move away from compulsory ongoing volunteer leader training to a focus on volunteers as lifelong learners. Mehmet and Howell share their story of developing the 1475 (Dulwich) Squadron Air Training Corps (ATC) Cadet Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) training course in the United Kingdom across various iterations to its contemporary form. In recounting their journey, they illustrate how striving for best practice can, when supported by reflective practice and reaching out to others for support, lead to innovation, constructive changes to program structure and practice, and in their words, seek 'to do things better'. In contrast, Minis explores common communication themes across the development and implementation of three programs managed by Criss Cross Consultancy in the Netherlands. By illustrating the link between practice, meaningful communication and inclusion, Minis shows that top-down and bottom-up communication practices can engage everyone, build co-ownership, recognise expertise and enable program content to be designed and adjusted to meet the needs of staff and children. Each of these three articles highlights an aspect of how meaningful communication between adults and children, staff, the organisation and the community can help to achieve positive change and sustain good practice.

Anna Lund and Mats Trondman, Sally Baisden, and Jen Hesnan and Eoin Dolan illustrate different aspects of good practice in the program environment that foster strength-based relationships between and among adults, youth and children. Lund and Trondman's article explores what makes learning matter among young people who drop back into schooling through a school-based program in the segregated, multicultural city of Malmö, Sweden. In moving the discussion away from community-based youth programs and focusing attention on the school environment, they show how common practices associated with successful programs — such as those that foster motivation and achievement, build positive peer, family and non-parental adult relations, ensure good leadership and support an inclusive ethos — apply across the diversity of environments where adults work with children. Baisden brings the focus back to community programs. She weaves the threads of youth empowerment, trusting and respectful relationships, community service, positive promotion and building community collective knowledge to provide a compelling narrative about the role of youth programs in building community capacity. Baisden argues that, by positioning young people as capable and competent, and supporting them to learn and demonstrate their skills and knowledge within

their community, the Queensland Emergency Services Cadet Program delivers specific and tangible positive outcomes for young people, adult volunteers and their communities. Hesnan and Dolan complete this grouping of articles by showing how relationships based on trust and mutual respect can be fostered by adults in a youth-led program environment using music technology, practice and public performance. Through their analysis of young people's experiences in the Irish Foróige SoundSurfers, they show how young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can be engaged and supported to develop mutual respect and share common interests through peer-supported activities. By fostering a diverse community of participants supported by skilled youth workers, Hesnan and Dolan argue, mainstream creative provision can build interdependence and empathy in young people.

Barry Checkoway, Karen Struthers and Grace Williams, and Philippa Hawke explore different aspects of the role adults can play in fostering the development and flourishing of youth voice and agency. Checkoway argues that many adults are conditioned to position youth in secondary roles, and would benefit from more information about how to successfully engage with young people as allies. He presents some of the strategies for preparing adults as allies to young people striving for social justice in Metropolitan Detroit, and across areas that are becoming more segregated and more diverse. Checkoway illustrates how adult allies can reach out and support young people to communicate across the boundaries that segregate them, and collaborate with others who are different from themselves. Struthers and Williams' article details the evolution of a new Queensland-developed respectful relationships education program, R4Respect. Their narrative provides an example of adults reaching out to empower young people as they tell of R4Respect's evolution from an adult-initiated and supported program into a youth-led participatory model in which young people feel valued and supported. Hawke applies this theme directly to learning and development outcomes as she explores the early intervention and prevention role played by child helplines in encouraging and strengthening children and young people's early forays into consequential thinking. By describing the processes counsellors use at the Australian Kids Helpline, she puts forward an argument that adults are more able to support better developmental outcomes when they encourage children and youth to become action planners themselves, rather than doing the thinking for them.

The final three articles, by Dean Williamson, Jennifer Skattebol, and Melissa Bull, Ross Homel, Paul Wright and myself, explore aspects of the growing international emphasis on the use of research-based evidence to inform youth program policy, practice and funding priorities. Williamson's article explores the link between program outcomes and practice, arguing that youth workers need to understand the impact of their practice on young people's outcomes in order to ensure best practice. Through introducing us to a pilot project that tested the first practitioner-led outcomes framework in New South Wales, he argues that external performance data are not only critical to both individual and organisational development but can also be used to enhance existing reflective practices such as workplace supervision. Jennifer Skattebol's article uses her narrative of working through an interview with a young woman in Inala, Queensland to uncover and explore her strengths. She argues that evaluation evidence is central to understanding and closing the equality gap, but in gathering this evidence we need to understand how young people themselves experience the resourcing and policy landscape. Finally, with Melissa

Bull, Ross Homel and Paul Wright, I explore the youth-inclusive research partnership through which my framework of good practice principles was developed. Crucially, this research project is an example of youth organisations reaching out to partner with external scholarly expertise to strengthen their internal research capacity. In this article, we explore some of the multifaceted methodological and ethical dimensions of involving young people in gathering program evidence and argue that youth-inclusive research can be shaped to bring broader benefits to research, scholars, young people and the wider community beyond the aim of simply improving the research process itself.

This special issue was necessarily a collaborative affair, and represents a large amount of goodwill, perseverance and hard work. My hope is that this work, represented in the diverse mix of practitioner and scholarly papers presented here, demonstrates the complex ecology of youth programs and the bi-directional links between program practice, staff and youth needs, contributions and outcomes. Together, the articles in this issue present Queensland research to the world, and open new directions in youth research in Australia and globally.