

Getting this second issue for 2005 to press seems to have been more of a challenge than usual. Our self-imposed deadlines have crashed a number of times. But, if you're reading this, we must have made it. The delay, of course, has meant that we are now conscious of more happenings in life's passing parade – the London bombings in particular. Many events in recent times have served to remind me that it is often hard to see what is going on and, on many occasions, we are acting with limited knowledge or using lenses of a particular hue. In spite of the massive and instant application of resources to the London emergency and the clamour of many, including the powerful and incessantly demanding media, it still took time to sort through many complexities and unknowns, and careful searching in hard to see places, to turn speculation into substantive intelligence. Even when that takes shape, issues remain concerning who should be informed of what, what matters demand privacy, confidentiality or even secrecy. Knowing what is going on is no simple matter.

A trawl through the web sites of the Commonwealth Government reveals a stunning array of activities and commitments likely to make a difference to this field. The Department of Family and Community Services web site points to a range of projects operating in disadvantaged areas, including the now well-established Reconnect program and other initiatives focusing on early intervention. There is also a substantial effort which incorporates the activities of Centrelink and the relationship concerns of family law which aim to enable individuals, families and communities to function better and be stronger. The funds attached, which are usually spent over a few years, appear substantial. A look at the monthly mail out of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (previously the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria) likewise points to a wide range of activity in Victoria, some initiated by government, some by the sector, and much in partnership, which appears to be rationally and almost inexorably making a huge difference. Among projects of prominence, I see ongoing work with the Looking After Children system of assessment, case planning and review, and I see yet another launch of a research report on the subject of leaving care. It occurs to me that on both of these subjects, the need for much more action has been obvious to anyone closely engaged with the field for at least 10 years.

In recent years I have had many encounters with the Reconnect program at grassroots level. Sterling work is being done in very difficult territory. In my view, however, the resources applied to it add up to a drop in the ocean relative to the need. When I look at the simple arithmetic associated with the cost of providing round-the-clock cover in a number of programs I have been associated with over the years, not to

mention the additional effort required to meet the specific needs of children and young people, I see little evidence of such understanding in resource allocations intended to cover large tracts of territory over longer periods of time. The evaluation industry is churning out vast quantities of material, but I suspect that much of it is not addressing the most cogent questions and, where it does, their messages are not always well heard. The clearest message I have heard in recent times has been – 'there are no more resources but, if they become available, you will have to jump through many hoops to obtain them.'

In this issue, some effort has gone into acknowledging our 30th year of publication. We have carried out some historical research and put together a brief history of the journal, drawing together some names and themes, and placing them in context of events taking place at the time. Lynda Campbell from the University of Melbourne has kindly contributed a contemporary note, and it is gratifying to receive such a warm testimonial for our efforts. We have also included a piece by Jennifer Lehmann in recognition of the important role played by the reviewers of papers submitted for publication.

Breaking some new ground is an article contributing new perspectives on the future of out-of-home care in Australia by Paul Delfabbro, Alexandra Osborn and James G. Barber. It draws on what has become a very significant research project for this field and challenges the limitations of past conceptions of the continuum of care. The proposed framework liberates us from some of the orthodoxies which appeared to have become dysfunctional in recent years. Some new flexibility and repackaging of our thinking is invited. The vulnerability of children with learning disabilities is the theme of the article by Freda Briggs and Russell Hawkins. Based on structured interviews of 116 New Zealand students aged 11 to 17, the hypothesis that additional effort is required to improve the safety of these young people was confirmed. Carolyn Cousins has contributed a penetrating, reflective critique of what is currently a popular practice approach. Her article 'The rule of optimism: Dilemmas of embracing a strength based approach in child protection work' does not seek to denigrate the approach, but points to a number of important issues which risk being overlooked in child protection work. This is a topic worthy of debate and we invite responses to the author's views. Working with men is a theme in contemporary practice which needed, and is now receiving, attention. Andrew King contributes some useful reflections on his practice experience, identifying both achievements and challenges in this specialised area.

Book reviews in this issue bring to our attention some useful new material from the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, spanning some themes of vital interest to those involved with adoption and permanent care. ❖

ERRATUM : Volume 29 Number 4. pp 4-11: Intensive Family Services in Australia: A 'snapshot', by Lynda Campbell

Our apologies to Dr Lynda Campbell, and those included below, for omitting the acknowledgments accompanying her article, as follows:

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