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Building on a forgotten past

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Editorial

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As we reach the midpoint of 2020, I can't help but notice that a number of the major social justice and welfare issues remain unresolved as countries have switched into emergency mode due to the Covid-19 pandemic. And the toll on people's well-being across the globe has been significant. While appropriate to deal with the health and economic impacts on populations, both locally and globally, it is concerning that we seem to have set aside the hard-won understandings of the benefits of social justice and welfare that lead to greater equity among people and have forgotten those who have fought long and hard to provide support and services in an effort to overcome disadvantage. While we are familiar with nations establishing various ways of providing help for their citizens, albeit at vastly varying degrees according political regimes and economic arrangements, we are less mindful that helping approaches have existed since prehistory. Some countries use government as the vehicle to deliver welfare and helping services, some use a combination of non-government- and government-led programmes, while others depend almost entirely on non-government efforts. For some people, family is virtually the only way in which support can be obtained with each generation expected to care for their elderly family members and contribute through their employment to the well-being of the extended family network. This mix of approaches to ensuring the well-being of those experiencing disadvantage will be familiar to you all, but where have we learnt about our helping and welfare history? Do we remember that around the world people have found and supported efforts to assist those who are disadvantaged over millennia and many of these efforts were recorded?

Most social work courses include attention to the history of the profession, as do a number of other professions such as nursing. We usually ensure that students are aware of the early pioneers of the profession who emerged in the UK and soon after in the USA. But understandings and knowledge of what contributes to the well-being of individuals and, hence communities have existed for much longer than our helping professions. In this editorial, I revisit some of the documented contributions to the welfare of children, young people and their families upon which social work and like professions have been built. Our knowledge might now be more strongly underpinned by research findings and be evidence based, but we shouldn't forget that many of our ideas have roots that predate research as we know it.

In the early dynasties of Egypt – around 3000 BC – a part of the leadership responsibilities of rulers concerned moral responsibilities to whole communities. This included the redistribution of food to communities experiencing famine, dispensation of law and the education of children, both girls and boys, who showed talents and potential leading to selection of skilled people from various classes in Egyptian society. High officials and local community leaders were, in turn, expected to take care of members of their communities. And in Roman times, there were educated women who set standards for family life and behaviour, but who also supported what we would call programmes for disadvantaged members of their societies. An example of this is described by Casson (1998) who has written on the everyday life in ancient Rome, including the nature of slavery. In this instance, slaves were not as we understand the term, but rather they were often abandoned children rescued from dumps and later sold as workers. Casson (1998, p. 16) states '[b]oth the government and private individuals tried to alleviate the situation by instituting child-assistance programs', and goes on to tell of a wealthy woman of Terracina who made a bequest in the memory of her son which provided enough money to support 100 boys and 100 girls until the boys were 16 years of age and the girls 14 years old.

The Bible indicates concern for children and their well-being with passages referring to the obligations that children have to parents and that parents have to children (Pachuau & Sarathy, 2015), as well as referring to acts of kindness and support that provide examples of Christian behaviour (for instance, the Good Samaritan story). From before AD 1000, there were expectations of women associated with convents and abbeys, or married to knights or landholders, to be educated and to carry the knowledge required for successful social life in villages and small communities, for instance, gynaecological information. Women also took responsibility for alms giving to assist local people living in poverty or who had a disability. Educated women were sought after by men who needed a competent partner to help organise and manage estates when they were absent. These women also took part in the development of early nursing and hospice services and schools for children which were often connected to abbeys, but not necessarily controlled by religious orders.

Later, the religious and wise men and women of church communities offered support and care for the physical and spiritual needs of men and women through their church structures; and cathedrals were known to have housed schools and hospitals for community members. Herlihy

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(1995, p. 232) comments on the number of hospitals and orphanages devoted to the care of children indicating the significant level of investment in children stating 'The oldest European orphanage of which we have notice was founded at Milan in 787'. Further, Herlihy (1995, pp. 229–230) describes social and psychological investment in children as growing substantially from the 11th and 12th centuries, together with a commitment to training which included general education and training in trades.

In 1201 the hospital of Santo Spirito on Sassia was founded and received foundlings, the sick and crippled, together with pilgrims (Herlihy, 1995) and the 13th century saw the establishment of foundling homes in a number of countries in Europe (Pachuau & Sarathy, 2015). For example, it was in Florence that records suggest that by the 1330s some 8,000 to 10,000 children attended schools when between the ages of 6 and 12 years and concern for abandoned babies was significant. By the 1420s, the city of Florence 'contained no fewer than three hospitals which received foundlings and supported them until an age when girls could marry and the boys could be instructed in a trade'; while there were also some 30 hospitals with over 1,000 beds for the 'poor and infirm' (Herlihy, 1995, p. 232).

From about the 1500s onwards, the concept of childhood began to undergo change and development. However, the continued concerns about the deserving/undeserving poor, and disadvantaged children becoming either good or bad as a result of their upbringing, permeated much of society's thinking in the UK and Europe. Such attitudes had a significant impact on the nature of the help a family or individual might receive. Some children were taken in by extended family or altruistic adults and received some degree of education, work preparation or trade, but many others were not so fortunate. The abuses of children and young people by adults that have been a part of human history continued, as they do to this present day. And the waves of globalisation, while taking trade, education and colonisation to many locations around the world, were limited in terms of offering welfare to colonists and provided little, if any, welfare support to indigenous communities who were dispossessed of land and livelihoods.

Moving forward to the 1660s, the City of London provided care for children at Christ's Hospital, and in the year 1667, there were 203 children in residence, 74 were put out as apprentices and 2 had died (Lord Mayor's Report, 1668). However, in the year 1667 there had been a fire that had destroyed a large part of the 'hospital' and funds were needed for rebuilding. Services and care provisions were reliant on gifts from benefactors, bequests, fundraising and government funds which were not always ongoing payments. Discussing early American responses to orphaned children and responses to the poor and disadvantaged, Katz and Fraga (1997) comment that issues of scarce labour as well as attitudes associated with deserving/undeserving families and individuals set the scene for the indenture of children in need of care. They state:

> The children of the struggling poor were subsequently indentured to local families by the communities (a form of poor relief), as a means of providing much needed resident labor and avoiding the propagation of a criminal element. It has been estimated that as many as 250,000 persons were indentured during the colonial period (Cohen, 1992)[1]. These included the American Indian, the Negro slave, and the most important source at least until the late seventeenth century, the 'indentured white servant' (1992, p. 15). (Katz & Fraga, 1997, p. 39)

We still face the issues of who is deserving and reservations about the provision of welfare today. In spite of 'welfare' in its broadest definition being available in many forms to a range of sectors in society, we hesitate when it comes to people who are in poverty, homeless, addicted to drugs or gambling and other disadvantaging circumstances. There continues the tendency to want to know 'why' in order to make judgements of need and responsibility – 'deservingness'.

We also have a long history of concern about the abuse of children and young people. Many of us think of the depictions of Charles Dickens about life in Britain, and frown at the idea of child labour, abuse and cruelty. But we have developed ideas about adult obligations for the treatment of children long before Dickens' time. Pachuau and Sarathy (2015, p. 89), citing Bhakhry (2006), comment that 'The Massachusetts Body of Liberties, 1641, highlights restrictions on adults in treating their children in regard to their social rights as well as abuse' and that 'Incest was a crime punishable by death in Scotland from 1757'. Ideas about child abuse in all its forms continue to evolve in terms of responses and interventions, but the essential beliefs about the rights of children and young people to be safe from harm are ancient, and for good reason given the imperatives for survival and reliance on subsequent generations contributing to social well-being.

A range of other examples of concern for the care and education of children are evident in the literature. Just on 200 years ago, Early Childhood Educators (ECE) in Montreal, Canada, were concerned about the well-being of children, particularly from poor families (Prochner, 2014). While their belief that poor people would not parent and educate their children sufficiently is not what we would support today, the 'ECE promoters in the 1820s were motivated to provide practical relief to children – food, clothing, and shelter – together with a desire to prevent future problems through the instruction of children' (Prochner, 2014, p. 45). Prochner (2014) goes on to describe the approach which was modelled on infant schools in Europe and North America:

> The only preschool model in Europe and North America in the 1820s was the infant school, which was inspired by a system for educating young children devised by Robert Owen for the children of his factory workers in Scotland in 1816. Owen's infant school combined a child care service with an early learning program for children from about 18 months to five years of age. Owen set out general principles for teaching very young children in groups: the importance of play and kindly treatment grounded in an idea of development and learning that stressed the malleability of children and the key role the senses played in acquiring knowledge about the world. Learning was planned to be informal via play and thus pleasurable for children and embedded in social relationships. (p. 45)

We continue to place value on the education of children from an early age, but in most countries fail to adequately reward the childhood educators who undertake this work. With increasing numbers of women in the workforce we are reliant, in Western Democratic countries at least, on being able to access care for children on a constant basis, and this has increasingly blurred with educative frameworks. We are also increasingly aware of the welfare aspects of education, an example being the concern that children are able to attend school during the corona virus pandemic isolation regimes because they are better off at school than at home. I find the lack of explicitness in these statements interesting, but it seems that there is at least some awareness that children are being exposed to increased family violence and are at risk of abuse, and unable to learn in optimal conditions in some home settings. Here again are many of the same concerns as expressed in centuries past – just the context might be a little different.

Coming back to the present, I ask myself why we should be concerned about what has gone before. Why should we be referring to

[1]Note this reference could not be located and is therefore not included in the Reference list.

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the historical features of welfare and our social work history? One of the answers to this question is because of my concern that there is limited attention to the history of the helping disciplines and worrying absences when it comes to issues such as the treatment of indigenous populations, the impacts of colonialism in western democracies and the breadth of efforts given to welfare by many individuals and community groups. I am not the only one either. Reisch (2019, p. 583) comments:

> Among younger scholars, the lack of a historical perspective takes another form. They often present ideas first expressed decades ago as new insights or repackage them into the latest intellectual boxes with scant recognition of their origins. Pouring old wine into new bottles may be an appealing marketing device, but it reinforces the trend to regard new developments in isolation from their historical roots.

It makes for difficulties if we believe that every new programme, so often developed with a catchy name, is something innovative, or even radical. We fail to acknowledge the work of our predecessors; we fail to draw appropriate and adequate conclusions about the success or otherwise of programmes due to lack of recognition of earlier approaches; and we develop a worrying degree of self-aggrandisement rather than acknowledging that we are merely making adjustments to services demanded by political stance, funding availability, changed context and circumstances and, sometimes, research evidence. It is particularly noticeable in countries in which marketing holds sway and attitudes to knowledge and learning are biased to the present and future rather than building on the past. I wonder if the reintroduction of history into our educational curriculums might serve to remind us that we are just a moment in time that follows a rich, thoughtful and significant effort by our forebears of centuries past.

Rachael and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our reviewers who, in spite of the pressures they have been under due to the pandemic, have continued to support the journal and its contributors. We are aware that many lives have changed significantly in recent months and in some countries the losses have been almost overwhelming. It is likely a new normal will emerge in time, but the stresses on us all, at many levels, will not be easily forgotten.

In this issue, we have a number of papers covering a diverse range of topics, beginning with a commentary by Michael Gaffney in our new 'International round-up' section. Michael muses on his long career in the Education sector and shares his breadth of knowledge on the changes to legislation and policy to the New Zealand education system over time. Michael walks us through some of the history of the political system that led to the current position and ruminates on this in the current political climate that is influenced by the global pandemic. This is followed by a Practice Reflections by Simon Gardiner whose career has been in the child and family welfare sector in Victoria. He reflects on his work and several client situations that have remained salient in terms of his experiential learning over the decades. He links his reflections to literature, commenting on important learnings for social workers that can be drawn from both practice and reading.

Two other practice commentaries raise questions and inspire us to think about the impact of the pandemic on already vulnerable children, and a third practice commentary that examines the utility of Expressive Art Therapies with children who have experienced attachment trauma. India Bryce explores the notion of *accumulation of adversity* for children and young people in the child protection system. India reflects on the ways that the recent lockdown response to the pandemic has exposed at risk children to greater risk of harm by adding another level of adversity to their already vulnerable positions. India examines literature on natural disasters, conflict and significant global events to draw parallels with children experiencing maltreatment during the current worldwide pandemic. Similarly, co-editor, Jennifer Lehmann, raises concerns in her commentary about the experiences of vulnerable children during this time of social distancing. Jennifer reflects on some core services that service to protect children and assist carers to manage their safety and well-being within a landscape of change and isolation. The third practice commentary examines therapeutic interventions that are thought to be helpful for vulnerable children and young people who have experienced early attachment trauma. Melissa Urquhart, Fiona Gardner, Margarita Frederico and Rachael Sanders present some of the core literature on therapeutic interventions for attachment trauma with a focus on right brain to right brain practice through tactual therapy. They present three case studies as a way of linking theory to practice and illustrating some of the key points made.

Next is a commentary by Meredith Kiraly, Tracey Hamilton and Jillian Green, is the publication of authoritative speeches given by Tracey and Jillian at the Kinship Care Forum in Brisbane in 2020. Their speeches are compelling reading, giving an insightful glimpse into the world of kinship care from a carer's perspective and include the challenges faced, the hurdles overcome and the support received. Our Commentaries are followed by an Opinion piece by me, Rachael Sanders, in which I raise questions and concerns about the potential impact that dominant features of neoliberalism, such as a high reliance on consumerism, may have on children's healthy development and socialisation. I hope to stimulate conversations about the ways that a strong consumer culture can influence children's socialisation and the impact that this may have on the parent–child relationship, particularly when intergenerational values and beliefs diverge.

Moving onto the articles found in this issue, we begin with a study by Leanne Francia, Prudence Millear and Rachael Sharman who spoke with mothers about their experiences of mothering after separation from a violent relationship. They report that mothers found themselves falling into a protective rather than parenting role because they were living in a context of isolation and fear, particularly as they traverse the family law system which is considered adversarial in nature. Also significant was the lack of opportunity to recover or fully remove themselves from the family violence, which led to cumulative and sustained harm for themselves and their children.

The *Jungle Tracks* programme is designed to aid children and young people from refugee backgrounds to reflect on their struggles with grief and loss, displacement, discrimination, disempowerment, difficulties with sleep and affect regulation that have resulted from traumatic incidents experienced as refugees, as well as ongoing challenges they face when settling into a new home, country and culture. Pearl Fernandez, Yvette Aiello and Emma Pittaway have undertaken a preliminary evaluation of the programme by speaking with facilitators about their perceptions of the utility of the programme. They received positive feedback and intend on undertaking further analysis of its effectiveness with the children themselves.

Sticking with programme evaluations, John Burns and Suzanne Brown present the findings of a mixed methods study that tracks the recruitment and retention of participants in the *Keeping Children Safe* parent education programme. Based on 13 years of data, the researchers discuss various factors they found to contribute to parents' retention in the parenting programme that targets vulnerable and disadvantaged families – a cohort that typically

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has low rates of engagement and higher rates of programme attrition.

Pamela Schulz provides a touching review of what appears to be a poignant book called *The Ben Book*, written by Michael Galvin. Pamela recommends this book and says that it 'is a story that shows humanity at its best', which is an ideal note to end this issue.

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