

Centre for Research on Community and Children's Services (CROCCS) Conference

Dr Jenny Higgins

In August 2007, the Centre for Research on Community and Children's Services' (CROCCS) held its annual conference in Airley Beach, Queensland. The theme of the conference was "Overcoming Violence and Poverty". The conference attracts a dedicated group of practitioners and researchers each year who are committed to engaging in productive and empowering work with communities and children's services. This informative and rewarding conference, being smaller than most, creates an intimate environment in which professionals get to know each other and share information about their work.

Keynote speakers included Professor June Thoburn, Emeritus Professor of Social Work in the UK, who was awarded the CBE in 2002 for her services to the sector. June's presentation, titled "Out-of-Home Care as a Response to Family Violence: Some Lessons From a Cross-National Study", provided findings from 13 developed countries on out-of-home placement as a response to family violence. June discussed the issue of capacity of the out-of-home placements to meet the children's needs within the care system. She concluded that governments need to be cautious when importing interventions that have been successful in one country into another, as the characteristics of children coming into care in each country vary, as do data collection processes. In order for policy makers to be well-informed, data collection should include information about which sorts of children are coming into care, the area they are from, their ethnicity and age group. These data can inform what sort of services are needed and what sort of interventions would be most appropriate to enhance outcomes for children in out-of-home-care.

Professor Cathy Humphries, the Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Welfare at the University of Melbourne, presented the keynote address on the second day, titled "Tackling Domestic and Family Violence: Balancing Aspirations and Action". Cathy discussed the findings of a project to build the mother-child relationship for families affected by domestic violence. She highlighted statistics that show that the perpetrators of domestic violence, particularly severe and ongoing violence, are usually husbands or male partners. Violence and abuse in the home, therefore,

is also an attack on the mother-child relationship when the adult victim is the child's mother. Cathy urged policy makers and family support workers to recognise this dynamic and work towards rebuilding and strengthening this important and vulnerable relationship. The project produced a resource called *Talking to My Mum: A Picture Workbook for Workers—Mothers and Children Affected by Domestic Abuse* (Humphreys, Mullender, Thiara, & Skamballis, 2006) that family support workers can use with mothers and children who have been victims of abuse.

On the final day, Michelle Moss, recipient of the 2006 Carmel Daveson Bursary Award, gave a keynote address on her therapeutic work with Indigenous children in foster care, titled "A Different Identity: An Exploration of Identity for Children in Foster Care". Her presentation featured an analysis of drawings by children in care, contrasted with children not in care. The findings of Michelle's study reveal that children in care fare worse in terms of sense of self, self-esteem and sense of connectedness compared to their peers not in care, even when parents of children living at home were unavailable and inconsistent. Michelle is currently a Team Leader with the Regional Placement Unit at Family and Children's Services in Darwin.

Dr Jenny Higgins from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse also presented at the conference the findings of her research project on supporting carers and Indigenous children in care. The presentation, titled "Promising Practices in the Assessment: Training and Support of Indigenous Carers and Indigenous Young People in Care—Findings From a National Study" is available on the NCH website (www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/presentations/diary.html). The findings from this study have also been published in four booklets available at: www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/promisingpractices/booklets/menu.html. There are also seven summary papers that are user-friendly outputs from an earlier phase of the project, available at: www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/promisingpractices/summarypapers/menu.html

References

Humphreys, C., Mullender, A., Thiara, R.K., & Skamballis, A. (2006). *Talking to my mum: A picture workbook for workers. Mothers and children affected by domestic abuse*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.

At the time of writing, Dr Jenny Higgins was a Research Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.