

Submission to Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry

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This is a personal submission made with a degree of haste but arising from a longstanding social work interest and some varied experience in the field over many years in the systems of care for children and young people. There are many elements in the terms of reference on which I would like to offer an opinion. Regrettably time has beaten me at this stage.

I would however like to ensure that the inquiry takes into account some research and approaches to work with young people and their families which I believe are potentially helpful in addition to the many positive efforts I have observed in recent years such as "Looking After Children" "Child First" and the development of "therapeutic residential care".

1. My own study completed in 2007 exploring good practice and optimal services for young people whose behavior challenges our various systems of care. The full thesis is accessible on line through the Australian Digital Thesis Program and La Trobe University. A brief summary of the study and findings follows.

Title: Looking For Good Practice And Optimal Services For Youth Facing Homelessness With Complex Care Needs And High Risk Or Challenging Behaviour

This study employed qualitative research methodology informed by the grounded theory tradition to explore good practice and optimal services for young people presenting with complex care needs associated with challenging or high risk behaviour. In-depth interviews were conducted in three waves of data collection and analysis with fourteen experienced practitioners whose careers have included sustained periods of work with this group in a number of selected Victorian service systems.

The principal vantage point was the interface between the supported accommodation and assistance programs for homeless young people, statutory child protection and care, placement and support programs for young people at risk and juvenile justice programs for young offenders. The nature of the problem necessarily included some consideration of mental health and services dealing with substance abuse.

The findings propose a view of good practice giving emphasis to the accessible and assertive presence of a responsible adult to "be there" fostering relationships and skilled purposive intervention. Intervention should be planned, holistic, sensitive and responsive to particular needs. It provides active unconditional care. It attends to attachment and trauma

concerns and works with short run goals and a long term perspective. Intervention is sustained until constructive disengagement can occur.

The complexity and challenge in the task of helping hurt youth warrants the support, strength and guidance of a multi-skilled team. Ideally the team will be described using normative terms. Optimal services are timely, congruent, seamless and robust in capacity to nurture, establish boundaries and meet developmental and therapeutic requirements. They should be connected to a community and there for as long as it takes, with ready access to suitable accommodation, purchasing power and flexibility of operation. To the greatest extent possible solutions are generated in the place where help is sought. Voluntary service commitment lasts till personal capacity and natural networks take over.

2. Re Residential Care - Another grounded theory study with a focus on residential care was completed by Jim Anglin in the Canadian out of home care system. I believe his work and the advice flowing from it is invaluable and is contained in his book

Anglin J.P (2002) *Pain Normality and the Struggle for Congruence: Reinterpreting Residential Care for Children and Youth* The Haworth Press

The Department of Human Services has taken some account of his work and he did visit Victoria some time ago. There is also some useful guiding content in book produced by Michael Durrant in Australia

Durrant, M.(1993) *Residential Treatment: A cooperative, competency-based approach to therapy and program design*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company.

Account should also be taken of the substantial work completed locally by Meredith Kiraly
Kiraly M. Residential Child Care Staff Selection: Choose with care *Child and Youth Services*
Vol 23 1,2, 2001.

I have also been very impressed by and have had some association with the system of training staff to deal with violent and potentially violent behavior in residential and other care settings. Developed by Cornell University it has been supported in Australia by the Thomas Wright Institute in Canberra (Dr Di Boswell) With emphasis on turning the crisis into a positive learning situation and safety for young people and staff it is worth thorough examination and investment. It is titled Therapeutic Crisis Intervention.

3. Parenting Support Approaches. There has been substantial work undertaken in resourcing parent education in the general community. There is a substantial lack however of more robust approaches being made available in a form able to reach and be utilized by the more vulnerable and challenged parents and their networks. The Australian programs ABCD and Triple P do have longer delivery forms entailing more support and rehearsal. Their use is not as widespread as needed. Another system which I believe has potential in more challenging situations is one

developed in the USA by social worker Dr Scott Sells. Titled Parenting With Love and Limits it can be delivered as a self help system or in a family coaching context or as a group program for parents and their adolescent children.

4. Early intervention with young people at risk of homelessness. In recent years I have had some ongoing involvement in the Geelong area with interagency efforts looking at early intervention approaches. Considerable progress is being made and much potential exists for ongoing research and development. A lead is being taken by the local SAAP agency Time for Youth. It is worthy of further examination (CEO is Mr Mike Kelly 5223 2966). The agency has also commenced delivering a delinquency early intervention program also.

My apology for the brevity and rushed nature of this submission and I wish you well in this important endeavour.

Lloyd Owen

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