

FOREWORD

Issue 26 of the *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* has several important and timely themes: family violence, partnership strategies, early intervention services for children and papers addressing tobacco, alcohol and other drug abuse. These comprise some of the key strategies, work areas and issues at the centre of current social policy in New Zealand. In particular, they include most of the critical social issues identified in the *Opportunity for All New Zealanders* strategy as priorities for interagency action over the next three to five years.

One of the identified critical social issues is “preventing family violence, and abuse and neglect of children and older persons”, and this is the focus of three papers contained here. The recently launched New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse emerged from the Te Rito New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy. Tracy Anderson, who was the project manager for the development of the clearinghouse, tells us about its purpose and how to access and contribute to it. The importance of this resource is reinforced by two research papers that I expect will become, themselves, assets of the clearinghouse. The paper by ‘Ana Hau’alofa’ia Koloto and Sashi Sharma is about the needs of Pacific women who are victims of family violence. Janice Giles, Helen Curren and Carole Adamson have written about public perceptions of partner abuse.

Another identified critical social issue is reducing tobacco, alcohol and other drug abuse. Research concerns in this area are the focus of two papers written by public health specialists. Peter Adams and Ian Hodges describe and advocate for a national strategy for research on tobacco, alcohol, other drugs and gambling. The paper by George Thomson and Louise Signal explores the issues and the current policies surrounding relations between the universities and the tobacco industry.

Several papers take up issues around partnership approaches, which make up an important strategy for progressing most of government’s social policies. Anna Matheson, Philippa Howden-Chapman and Kevin Dew write about the value of partnerships between the government and the community to reduce health inequalities. Jo Cribb focuses on the accountability relationships in which voluntary organisations are involved, how they prioritise them, and the implications for contracting mechanisms. A government-community partnership to promote economic development is the focus of Meenakshi Sankar’s paper. Chungui Qiao’s review of the Population Association of New Zealand conference identifies a communities theme, and a focus on ethnic and migrant communities.

There is broad and strong support for the value of intervening early to help vulnerable and at-risk children, and also as a strategy for addressing a third identified critical social issue: improving educational achievement among low socio-economic groups. A literature review by Joan Sykora identifies the kinds of outcomes that early intervention services can achieve, and the characteristics of programmes that have the best impacts. Tina Robilliard focuses on the outcomes of family-based early interventions in California for protecting children from abuse and neglect.

Identity issues loom large in a group of papers that deal with very diverse groups of people. Mark Henrickson writes about gay, lesbian and bisexual parents, and one aspect that he explores is the time in their lives at which the parents came out to themselves and to others. In their study of adoptees who have reunited with their birth parents, Julee Browning and Grant Duncan examine the sorts of relationships that emerge between adoptees and a range of birth-family members, and how they label these connections. Paul Spoonley, covering the field more broadly, contributes a book review of a set of readings on New Zealand identity edited by Jim Liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh and Teresia Teaiwa.

Jane Kelsey reviews *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History* edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant. She addresses the importance of expanding one's understanding of social policy by looking beyond the formal statutes to observe the operational level. Similarly, when Steven La Grow and Paula Daye asked members of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind what held them back from employment, their responses also fell into the formal or structural (direct and indirect consequences of vision impairment) and the informal (attitudes of prospective employers).

The papers here focus on several powerful themes central to government policy directions and they range broadly enough to provide something of value for everyone with an interest in social policy. I believe that you will find Issue 26 to be a particularly stimulating read.



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