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Recent Research Abstracts

Vol. 9 – September 2003

CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

Whiting & Lee (2003) Voices from the system – a qualitative study of foster children's stories. *Family Relations* 52 (3), 288-295

This project qualitatively analysed the stories that 23 preadolescent foster children told about their lives. An ecological framework in conjunction with the social constructionist understanding of stories guided the ethnographic semistructural interviews. These stories contained both common and unique features and provided insight into the lives of foster children whose environments involved poverty, drugs, crime, violence and racism. Research domains included confusion, social ambivalence, anger, loss and aids to resiliency. This study highlights the importance of these stories for the children who create them and those who will work with them.

Thomson & Thorpe (2003) The importance of parents in the lives of children in the care system *Children Australia* 28 (2), 25-31

Research to date has found that natural parents may be an important source of identity and support for children in and young people leaving out-of-home care. There has, however, been limited research on natural parents themselves, both internationally and in Australia. This paper provides a justification for a research focus on parents, documents what is known from research to date, highlights current issues for parents and their children in out-of-home care, and concludes by identifying future research priorities in the area. The paper calls for recognition of the need to maintain positive links between natural family members in order to ensure best practice outcomes for children and young people in care.

Wise, S. (2003) Using Looking After Children to create an Australian out-of-home care database. *Children Australia*, 28 (2), 38-44

There is a paucity of publicly available information on Australian children in out-of-home care. Data on the characteristics of children in care, their experiences during placement, and the services provided for them are badly needed to monitor service effectiveness, to identify where service improvements can be made and to ascertain how to improve the allocation of resources. This paper provides a rationale for using information collected on the 'Looking After Children' (LAC) schedules to generate an Australia-wide database on children in out-of-home care, as well as identifying some of the problems to be overcome if the LAC schedules are to be used to collect aggregate data.

Delfabbro, P. & Barber, J. (2003) Before it's too late: Enhancing the early detection and prevention of long-term placement disruption. *Children Australia*, 28 (2), 14-18

In this paper, we examine some of the principle findings of a recent 3 year longitudinal study into foster care in South Australia and their implications for addressing the needs of children who experience high rates of placement disruption while in care. A critical finding of this study was that many of the most serious problems in foster care, such as repeated placement disruption, can be anticipated and predicted with considerable accuracy. Children who experience a disproportionately higher rate of placement disruption appear to be readily identifiable at intake. In addition, there appears to be an approximate threshold or point beyond which children subject to placement disruption begin to experience significant deterioration in their psychosocial functioning.