

**Editorial**

Donal Giltinan

**Newspoints**

**'It's just common sense isn't it?' Exploring ways of putting the theory of resilience into action**

Brigid Daniel, Sally Wassell and Robbie Gilligan

**Key words:** resilience, planning, residential care, fostering, enhancing outcomes

Planning for accommodated children may often be built around ensuring a secure home. However, it is also important to attend to other domains in children's lives. The promotion of the long-term emotional well-being of children has to be based on information about the factors associated with better outcomes. The findings from research into factors related to resilience in children provide many useful pointers for such practice. The authors describe a pilot project aimed at exploring the feasibility of putting ideas from the concept of resilience into action. Through a series of workshops with child care practitioners the domains of secure base, education, friendship, talents and interests, positive values and social competencies were considered. Ideas for mapping levels of current resilience were discussed, as well as suggestions for practice aimed at its promotion.

**Mediation and post-adoption contact: the early experience of the Post-Adoption Centre Contact Mediation Service**

Carol Kedward, Barry Luckock and Hilary Lawson

**Key words:** post-adoption contact, mediation, adoptive parents, birth parents children, power

Post-adoption contact, whether through letterbox arrangements or direct links between the adoptive child and family and the birth parents and relatives, is becoming a common practice aspiration. However, adoption law remains rooted in assumptions of severance and the courts are extremely reluctant to order such contact and thereby interfere with the right of adoptive parents to make their own decisions. In this situation agreements have to be voluntarily negotiated and mediation has been proposed as a method of helping birth and adoptive parents to come to joint decisions about the nature and extent of post-adoption contact. **Carol Kedward, Barry Luckock and Hilary Lawson** report and discuss the results of a small-scale, evaluative study of the service outcomes and experiences of parents who were in touch with the Post-Adoption Centre Contact Mediation Service during the first two years of its operation.

## **Exchanging information post adoption: views of adoptive parents and birth parents**

Janette Logan

**Key words:** adoption, post adoption, information exchange, contact

This article reports on the findings of a research study which examined the experiences of adoptive parents and birth parents who were involved in an information exchange scheme. While both acknowledged the importance of exchanging information, different views were expressed as to how the exchange should happen and people's experiences were considerably influenced by their pattern and process of exchange. This study provides empirical evidence to suggest that the exchange of information is by no means straightforward and easy to accomplish in a way that satisfies the needs – in particular the long-term needs – of those involved in the adoption triangle.

## **Adoptive mothers' attitudes to contact: highlights from an Australian study**

Susan Gair

**Key words:** adoption, adoptive mothers, contact, Australia

The topic of contact and reunion can be a complex and emotional one for birth parents, adopted people and adoptive families. While the perspectives of birth parents and adopted people regarding contact are evident in the literature, the range of possible attitudes taken up by adoptive parents are not extensively discussed. Susan Gair explores coping positions or attitudes taken by adoptive mothers in Queensland on the topic of contact. The larger research project from which these findings are drawn was concerned primarily with using qualitative research methods to explore the mothering experiences of Queensland women who have adopted children. The research findings suggest that adoptive mothers may be better understood by considering a number of factors which impact on the taking up of certain attitudes, and by recognising the transitory rather than assuming the static qualities of such positions.

## **The tangible and intangible rewards of fostering for carers**

Sandra Butler and Marian Charles

**Key words:** fostering disruption, rewards of fostering, placement dynamics

This article discusses findings from a small-scale research project examining the dynamics involved in substitute family placements for young people, and assessing the processes demonstrated in fostering breakdowns in terms of the interactions, negotiations and adjustments between the respective parties over time. While briefly exploring carers' expectations of tangible rewards from these experiences, the authors concentrate on the powerful and pervasive effects of intangible rewards. These relate to carers' beliefs that love and care would be reciprocated, that young people would express gratitude, and that they would change sufficiently to fit into their substitute family. Recognising that tangible rewards alone are insufficient to retain carers' valuable services and resources on any long-term basis, the article concludes with suggestions for attending to intangible rewards as a means of maintaining carers' role satisfaction through a crucial sense of a 'job well done'.

## **The state's legitimate interest: an open letter to Matthe Engel**

Charlotte Stevens

**Key words:** intercountry adoption

In May 1999 the journalist, Matthew Engel, published a feature article in the Weekend section of the UK *Guardian* newspaper about his personal experience of being assessed as an adoptive parent for a child from Siberia. He described his social worker as friendly, caring and conscientious, but he was highly critical of the law, practice and procedure relating to adoption:

*This country has turned the adoption of a child into something very close to a crime; the perpetrators are harried, if not actually punished... British adoption practice has become so obsessed with finding the perfect parents that the best has become the enemy of the good.*

He commended a US agency approach to home studies which he suggested resembles more of a 'chat over coffee and carrot cake'.

Engel rightly questioned the state's legitimate interest here and raised some very important social issues about the nature of adoption in the natural cycle of parenthood and childhood. We do not know if his views are unique or widespread. The jury has been out for some time on how a good society should respond to the children orphaned by poverty in another nation or how a responsible profession can achieve the right balance between preparation and investigation in adoption work.

Charlotte Stevens's letter was *originally written as a private response to Matthew Engel's article. It is published in Adoption & Fostering* because it highlights many of the core issues and enriches the debate about the role of the state in the lives of the world's most vulnerable children.

### **Research for practice: Growing up in foster care**

Gillian Schofield

### **Legal notes: England and Wales**

Deborah Cullen

### **Legal notes: Scotland**

Alexandra Plumtree

### **Legal notes: Northern Ireland**

Ruth Lavery

### **Medical notes: Hepatitis and HIV practice note**

Alice Noon

### **Book reviews**

### **Diary**