

Working with Vulnerable Families

A Partnership Approach

Second Edition

Poverty, domestic violence, marginalisation and drug and alcohol dependence are just some of the issues faced by many Australian families. Now in its second edition, *Working with Vulnerable Families* provides a comprehensive and evidence-based introduction to family-centred practice in Australia. It explores the ways in which health, education and social welfare professionals can support and protect children and their families.

Fully revised and updated, with 8 new chapters, the book examines recent research and programs on relationship-based family support, parental substance misuse, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and children and family violence. It encourages readers to 'think child, think family, think community' in order to promote the development, wellbeing and safety of young children and future generations.

Each chapter features learning goals, local case studies, reflective questions and links to online resources to help reinforce and extend the reader's understanding. Written by a diverse team of experts from around Australia, this is an indispensable resource for students and practitioners alike.

Fiona Arney is Professor and Chair of Child Protection and Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia.

Dorothy Scott is Emeritus Professor and has an adjunct academic position at the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia, and is also an honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne.

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A Partnership Approach

Second Edition

Edited by
Fiona Arney and Dorothy Scott



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*This book is dedicated to our partners,
Alwin Chong and Alan Clayton*

Foreword

Nelson Mandela suggested that the soul of a nation was reflected in how well it treated its most vulnerable; Hilary Clinton used an old African saying, 'it takes a village to raise a child' for the title of a book. Both quotations are pertinent to this book.

We live in a world of pressures – to earn lots of money, to be smart, to be successful, to look like a film star, to have a big house, to cook like a TV hostess, to eat like a king, to work long hours, to have lots of stuff. Where are our children in all of this frenetic activity? How can we be parents as well as workers? Where are our role models? How valued are the carers of our children? How much do we value children for themselves? What if my child does not look or behave like the one on the back of the Farex packet smiling sweetly at dinnertime? Does anyone care? The authors of this book do, and they have taken a determined and well-researched path to help us understand and help vulnerable families in today's challenging society.

I feel honoured to have been asked to write the foreword for this wonderful book, which is so very timely for Australian parents, children and those who work in the range of services aimed at helping them grow through the most vulnerable times of their lives. The book has emerged from the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia under the leadership of its current Director, Professor Fiona Arney and its foundation Director, Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott. The Centre showcases a wonderful blend of research, advocacy, practitioner training and support.

The public health approach to child abuse and neglect suggested here is a sensible and urgent one. To continue to observe the increases in child abuse substantiations and to only respond to the crisis end in punitive ways is both illogical and inhumane. Approaches that attempt to prevent families reaching such crisis situations and that harness all possible ways to enhance family functioning in this challenging 21st century are clearly the way in which child abuse and neglect will be reduced. A public health approach to child maltreatment means that we need to know the causes, to intervene in effective ways along the various pathways and to build the capacity of practitioners to do so.

I appreciate the ways in which the book relates the understandings of how children and parents interact and develop and how, for so many families, the challenges

of parenting make the family vulnerable due to a variety of different scenarios. Understanding these contexts is essential if we are to deliver the services that will really help. I have just become a grandmother, which is a joy beyond imagination, and this little one is surrounded by love and care, with easy access to his child health nurse and a good GP and his nursery placement is already being planned. I often imagine the circumstances of other children not so blessed and feel anguish for them and their families.

From the various chapters emerge a holistic, sensible, caring and evidence-based set of approaches to help vulnerable families, with many real-life examples of what works best. Although this has an Australian focus (good for us that we have at last some great home-grown examples!) this book is relevant for all children, all families and communities everywhere. The principles apply wherever children are being born and nurtured.

Fiona J. Stanley
AC Patron, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
Distinguished Research Professor, University of Western Australia
Vice-Chancellor's Fellow, University of Melbourne
FFA, FASSA, MSc, MD, FFPHM, FAFPHM, FRACP, FRANZCOG, Hon DSc, Hon DUniv,
Hon MD, Hon FRACGP, Hon FRCPCH, Hon MD, Hon DSc, Hon LLB (*honoris causa*)

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Contributors

Professor **FIONA ARNEY** is the Chair of Child Protection and Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. Fiona was Deputy Director of the Centre until she moved to the Menzies School of Health Research in early 2010 to establish and lead their Child Protection Research Program. With 16 years' research experience with children, parents, families and practitioners, she has a strong body of research, especially in relation to Aboriginal children and families. Fiona is a member of research teams examining the factors affecting the use of research in policy and practice and the organisational and individual preconditions required for the adoption and adaptation of promising practices.

MARIA BARREDO is a cross-cultural facilitator and cultural competency trainer with over 20 years of experience working with migrant and refugee communities. She is working in Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in Alice Springs managing a primary health care clinic servicing the Aboriginal population in Central Australia. Maria was a Board Director in the Australia Refugee Association from 2003 to 2009; a member of the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission (from 2003 to 2008), and a National Chair of Women's Policy with the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia for four years. Maria was the senior adviser to the Archbishop of Adelaide as well as Director of Multicultural Affairs of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide for seven years. Prior to that she was a regional coordinator of the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Program under the Migrant Resource Centre in SA.

Associate Professor **LEAH BROMFIELD** is the Deputy Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. Prior to her appointment to UniSA in 2010, she was a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies and managed the National Child Protection Clearinghouse. She has completed a PhD on the topic of chronic maltreatment and cumulative harm in a child protection sample. She has broad research interests and experience in the fields of child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care. Her areas of

specialty are child protection systems, chronic maltreatment and cumulative harm, and research into policy/practice.

ALWIN CHONG is a Wakamin man from Far North Queensland and is currently the Transition Manager with the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Inc. (AHCSA). He previously worked with the Menzies School of Health Research as the Indigenous Strategy and Development Coordinator in Darwin. Prior to relocating to Darwin, Alwin worked with the Aboriginal Health Council of SA (AHCSA) as the Senior Research and Ethics Officer for 11 years. An essential component of the position was the management of the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee (AHCSA), a subcommittee of the Council and the peak ethics body for Aboriginal Health in South Australia, which involves working with researchers. Alwin has undertaken extensive research into and promoted Indigenous Management practices, conducted an exclusive literature review, delivered seminar papers and collaborated with several academic colleagues who have incorporated Indigenous Management practices into their teaching modules

SHARON DAWE is a Professor in Clinical Psychology at Griffith University. She has been working as a researcher and clinician in the field of substance misuse and mental health for over 20 years, beginning her clinical career at Odyssey House, Auckland, New Zealand. She then moved to the United Kingdom, where she worked at the Maudsley Hospital, London, as a clinical psychologist in the drug dependence unit. Her PhD, completed at the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, investigated the neural mechanisms involved in drug reward. Her current work focuses on reducing child maltreatment in high-risk families with parental substance abuse and mental illness. She has developed the Parents Under Pressure program in collaboration with Paul H. Harnett of the University of Queensland. She holds an adjunct position with the Australian Centre for Child Protection.

Dr **RICHARD FLETCHER**, PhD, taught science in NSW, Kenya and the United States before returning to Australia to pioneer domestic violence prevention within Health Promotion. He subsequently initiated Men's and Boys' Health as areas of study and is currently Leader of the Fathers and Families Research Program at the Family Action Centre, Faculty of Health, University of Newcastle, NSW.

CHRISTINE GIBSON is the Community Research Liaison Coordinator at the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. Previously she was Manager of Research and Quality Assurance for UnitingCare Burnside (a respected

NSW child welfare agency) and, prior to that, a Lecturer in the School of Social Work at the University of New South Wales and a consultant. Her practice has been in the fields of child and family welfare, out-of-home care, domestic violence, tenancy and immigration. As well as having substantial experience with both the conduct and the oversight of studies evaluating service interventions, she has conducted research on out-of-home care, homeless children and the application of diffusion of innovation theory to child welfare. Christine has contributed to policy debate and law reform at national and state levels. She holds a Bachelor degree in Social Work and a Masters degree in Policy Studies.

PAUL HARNETT is a Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at the University of Queensland. He has worked clinically and conducted research in the area of child protection since 1987. He spent many years working as a Clinical Psychologist in a specialist child protection team at the Maudsley Hospital in London. In Australia, he has worked as a Clinical Psychologist in care and protection for the NSW Department of Community Services. Over the past 12 years his work has focused on developing an evidence-based assessment model for child protection (Capacity to Change, C2C) and the Parents Under Pressure (PuP) program, an internationally recognised training program for clinicians working with families in which there are many difficult life circumstances such as anxiety, substance misuse and family conflict and helping parents facing such adversities to develop positive and secure relationships with their children. A major motivating force for his work are the memories of the young children he cared for while working as a residential care worker in a South London children's home in the late 1980s.

CATHY HUMPHREYS is Professor of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. For five years she held the Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Welfare, a professorship established in collaboration with the Alfred Felton Trust, the Department of Social Work at the University of Melbourne and the Centre for Excellence for Child and Family Welfare in Victoria, the peak body for more than 95 child and family welfare agencies in Victoria. The Chair is now supported by the University of Melbourne-Sector Research Partnership, a consortium of 14 Victorian community sector organisations that are driving research in the children, youth and families area. A sustained program of research in the areas of domestic and family violence, out of home care and research utilization has now been established. Cathy Humphreys has extensive practice experience, having worked as a social work practitioner in the mental health, domestic violence, and children, youth and families sector for 16 years before becoming a social work academic.

KERRY LEWIG is a project manager at the Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia. Her research interests prior to joining the Australian Centre for Child Protection have been in the areas of work satisfaction, engagement, work stress and burnout in the human services and volunteer sectors. Kerry's work at the Centre has included projects that have sought to understand the role that research plays in child protection practice and policy-making, the factors influencing the implementation and dissemination of promising child and family welfare programs, and the reasons why newly arrived refugee families come into contact with the child protection system and how these families may be best supported to adjust to the challenges of parenting in a new culture. Her current research interest is in the field of child protection workforce retention and wellbeing. Kerry is a registered psychologist and holds a Masters degree in Organisational Psychology.

Dr **SARAH MARES** is a child and family psychiatrist with an established clinical and academic interest in the peri-natal and early childhood periods and in prevention and intervention with highly disadvantaged populations, including those involved with child protection services, Indigenous families in remote communities and refugee and asylum-seeking families. She is currently Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin and prior to this was Senior Staff Specialist in the Alternate Care Clinic for children in out-of-home care at Redbank House in Western Sydney. She is an experienced multidisciplinary educator, supervisor and consultant. Her publications include Mares, Newman & Warren (2005/2011), *An Introduction to Clinical Skills in Infant Mental Health: The First Three Years*, ACER Press, and Newman & Mares (eds) (2012), *Contemporary Approaches to Infant and Child Mental Health*, IP Press.

KATE MCGUINNESS is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Child Development and Education at the Menzies School of Health Research, based in Darwin, Northern Territory. Kate has over 17 years' experience working with children and families as a practitioner, policy adviser and researcher. Kate has worked for a range of government and non-government organisations in Australia, Ireland and the UK including as a paediatric social worker and child protection practitioner. Kate's current research interests focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect in the Northern Territory, social work practice in culturally diverse contexts and, more broadly, how research can be effectively translated into evidence-informed practice in the human services.

SARA MCLEAN is a registered Psychologist who has been working in child and adolescent mental health since 1997. Her experience includes clinical work in

both community teams and in interagency multidisciplinary teams that support children and adolescents with significant and serious mental health and behavioural concerns. Her PhD research focused on challenging and aggressive behaviour among children who have been removed from their family of origin due to abuse or neglect (children living in out-of-home care). This research critically analysed the models and approaches that guide workers' practice in the management of children exhibiting problem behaviours. As a Research Fellow at the Australian Centre for Child Protection, she combines her clinical and research skills to examine the support needs of children in out-of-home care.

Dr **ROBYN MILDON** is the Director of Knowledge Exchange and Implementation at the Parenting Research Centre. Robyn's work focuses on two main areas: the use of effective implementation strategies to improve the utilisation of evidence-informed information and practice and closing the gap between 'what we know' and 'what we do' by improving the science and practice of implementation. Robyn and her team work in partnership with agencies and services to develop, implement and evaluate evidence-based programs and practice approaches to working with families. Robyn has authored and co-authored numerous papers published in peer-reviewed journals and edited book chapters and presented at several national and international conferences, including invited keynote presentations and invited workshops.

ELIZABETH REIMER is an Associate Researcher at the Centre for Children and Young People and Lecturer in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University. She has previously worked as a PhD candidate at the Australian Centre for Child Protection (University of South Australia), as Senior Policy and Research Officer for the Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory 2010, and as a Policy Officer at NSW Family Services Inc. Elizabeth's research focus includes family support, youth work, prevention and early intervention dimensions of the child wellbeing continuum, child neglect, and personalised ways of working in professional family work relationships.

Associate Professor **GARY ROBINSON** heads the Indigenous Parenting and Family Research Unit within the Centre for Child Development and Education, which is funded to implement innovative programs to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children. Formerly Principal Research Fellow in Childhood Intervention, Development and Wellbeing at the Charles Darwin University, Gary's ethnographic publications remain influential in approaches to Aboriginal youth suicide and conflict. His publications arising out of the Coordinated Care Trial evaluation reports,

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the ABCD projects, and the report of the Accelerated Literacy Evaluation have been highly influential. Associate Professor Robinson's recent publications have focused on health service development, mental health services, Indigenous child development and social-emotional wellbeing. The increasing impact of his published research is reflected in the invitation to develop a number of discussion papers to inform the Northern Territory Early Childhood Planning process.

Dr **MARY SALVERON**, one of the founding staff at the Australian Centre for Child Protection in 2005, recently returned to the Centre as Postdoctoral Research Fellow investigating the Signs of Safety approach in Western Australia. Funded by the Department for Child Protection (WA), the research collaboration aims to examine the implementation, delivery and uptake of the Signs of Safety approach and its impact on children, parents, carers, practitioners and other partner organisations/agencies. Mary has over seven years' experience in the fields of child protection and early childhood and has undertaken research into the factors that help and hinder the spread of innovations in child protection, as well as research and evaluations with diverse populations. Her practice experience also extends to managing the health programs and promotions delivered by a community-controlled Aboriginal organisation in country South Australia.

Emeritus Professor **DOROTHY SCOTT** has an adjunct academic position at the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia, and is also a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne. Dorothy was the Foundation Chair of Child Protection and the inaugural Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. Previously she was Head of the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne and, prior to that, the Executive Director of the Ian Potter Foundation. Her clinical practice has been in the fields of child welfare, sexual assault and mental health. Her research has also been in these areas as well as in the fields of maternal and child health, and child protection policy reform. She has been an adviser to national and state governments, and for her services to the community she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia and the Centenary Medal.

ARON SHLONSKY is Professor of Evidence Informed Practice at the University of Melbourne Department of Social Work, Associate Professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, Scientific Director of the Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (OCANDS) and Co-Chair of the Campbell Collaboration Social Welfare Coordinating Group. After graduating from UC Berkeley with a doctorate

in Social Welfare and a Masters degree in Public Health, Shlonsky was an Assistant Professor at Columbia University School of Social Work. His professional interests include child welfare, the assessment of risk, administrative data analytics, and the use of evidence in practice.

Dr **MENKA TSANTEFSKI** is a Lecturer in Social Work specializing in child and family related subjects. Prior to joining the University of Melbourne, Menka designed and managed programs for families affected by parental substance use and, for over 15 years, provided home-based services to vulnerable children, their parents and extended families in a range of roles and settings. She has also delivered training and secondary consultations to adult-focused services to improve responsiveness to children's needs.

GRAHAM VIMPANI AM is Professor and Head of the Discipline of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Newcastle; Clinical Chair of Kaleidoscope: Hunter Children's Health Network within the Hunter New England Area Health Service; and Medical Director of the Child Protection Team of the John Hunter Children's Hospital in Newcastle. He is a community paediatrician with a long-standing interest in promoting child health and development through a range of early intervention strategies that address the support needs of families with infants and young children. He is Co-Chair of the Children's and Young People's Health Priority Task Force in NSW and a member of the Health Care Advisory Council. He is Chair of the Board of NIFTeY Australia (the National Investment for the Early Years), a cross-sectoral advocacy body established in 1999 to promote greater awareness of the importance of the early years of life.

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Fiona Arney and Dorothy Scott