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.
Working with Vulnerable Families

A Partnership Approach

Second Edition

Edited by
Fiona Arney and Dorothy Scott
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
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Contributors

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

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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.

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Fiona Arney and Dorothy Scott