

Putting Children First – our authors

Putting Children First was launched in March 2002. Since then there have been 39 issues produced, including this final commemorative issue. The magazine has been distributed quarterly to over 16,000 mailing addresses across Australia, comprising child care services, organisations, individuals and family day care educators.

The main focus of *Putting Children First* has been to provide information and support to children's services working through the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems. One of our constant challenges has been to ensure that we have provided accurate information that has also been pertinent to educators working in long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services.

NCAC has been fortunate over the years to have had many writers develop articles for *Putting Children First* on a wide range of topics and issues. We offer each of the individuals and organisations who have contributed to the magazine our heartfelt thanks.

Nicky Morris spoke with some of our regular internal and external contributors to gain an insight into their thoughts about writing for *Putting Children First*, and their contributions to NCAC and the child care sector.

Heather Barnes



Heather Barnes has had a long association with NCAC, initially as a Reviewer Trainer then Moderator and, more recently, as a member of the Quality Advisory Group. She has her own early childhood consultancy and provides training through the Professional Support Coordinators to educators working in child care settings in various parts of the country. Heather had been presenting training sessions throughout Australia, so NCAC approached her to write about some of the topics on which she had been presenting.

I have enjoyed researching and writing for the wide audience that reads *Putting Children First*. I'm not sure if it was my favourite, but the article that had the most interesting response was *The value of superhero play* (Issue 27, September 2008). A Victorian newspaper did an article on superhero play, quoting the article in *Putting Children First* and then I was invited to be a guest on the 9am Show with David and Kim on Channel 10 to discuss it.

I think *Putting Children First* has been a wonderful resource for educators. In every edition there were several articles of interest that encouraged reflection and that helped to improve practice. They were short enough to be read in a lunch break and each edition could be saved for future reference ■

Dr Anne Kennedy



After retiring from Monash University, NCAC approached Anne to write for *Putting Children First*. She has enjoyed working with the NCAC editorial team which has provided Anne with constructive feedback and encouragement on all aspects of her articles through development to publication. Being able to take 'big ideas' or theories, and make them accessible for a wide audience is a skill which Anne hopes to continue to develop as a writer in her areas of interest. Anne believes that all writers need inspiration from others, and some excellent Australian early childhood writers, including the late Dr Rosemary Milne and her friend and colleague Anne Stonehouse, continue to provide Anne with this inspiration.

Most importantly for me there is always pleasure in writing articles that you trust will be helpful for educators or families. Every article I have written for *Putting Children First* has presented a challenge in that I have had to think carefully about content and examples that would be relevant for a wide range of readers who work or who have connections with different service types.

I think the article *Ethics: A part of everyday practice* in child care (Issue 29, March 2009), is a favourite for several reasons. It was the first article I wrote for *Putting Children First*. Also, ethics is central to our work with children, families and colleagues. Ethics is often thought of as being an abstract concept, but it is a very practical matter which is the message I hoped to convey in this article ■

Anne Stonehouse



For the whole of her professional life, spanning about 40 years, Anne's favourite endeavour has been, and still is, writing for educators and parents. She likes the idea of being a translator, and taking concepts and ideas that are academic, theoretical or in other ways not very accessible, and expressing them in ways that are relevant, engaging and informative. Anne has worked independently as a consultant for the past nine years, and has enjoyed many wonderful opportunities to write.

I've enjoyed knowing that when I write something for *Putting Children First* it will go directly to educators. Writing *Family Factsheets* for NCAC has also been satisfying – the idea that families and educators receive information on the same topic which will enable them to share information, and make decisions together is great. Anything that supports partnerships is worthwhile!

I enjoyed writing 'Connecting with children's lives' (Issue 28, December 2008) because although the idea isn't new, I think we now have a deeper understanding of what that means and why it's important. I wrote that article while I was involved in the development of the EYLF, and I knew that the idea of taking into account children's lives in their families, cultures and communities was likely to feature quite prominently in the Framework.

My hope was that the articles would provoke discussion, robust debate and critical reflection about a wide range of practices. I would never want to present information in a way that implies that 'this is the right or best way to do things', but in a way that supports educators to think and take action to improve their practice. Real improvement in practice has to be motivated from within – within the service, within the people involved ■

Sonja Tansey



After 20 years working in the early childhood education field as practitioner, advisor and trainer, Sonja decided to try her luck as a freelance writer and editor. That was five years ago and since then Sonja has worked for a broad range of industries and businesses. But early childhood education remains close to her heart – so writing opportunities with the NCAC and other early childhood agencies stay at the top of her 'most wanted' list. Sonja loves the continuous link this gives her with the early childhood profession that spawned her love of writing.

The greatest fulfilment is that writing gives me the opportunity to be able to 'talk' with educators and offer something that might help out in their daily work with young children, families and peers. Each new article and topic is a challenge – even when I think I'm an expert on the subject! It only takes a few hours of research in each new area to be humbled by the breadth of information and commitment that is out there in the child care and education field.

Researching the article 'Supporting children through loss and grief' (Issue 27, September 2008) touched me deeply. It gave me a chance to reflect on the fragility of childhood in a world that can be pretty scary. It struck me how incredibly important it is for us to really know babies and children and to have close, warm and genuine relationships with them – to know when they may be hurting and to support them in developing resilience ■

Jan McFarlane



Jan has been employed at NCAC since 2001. During this time she has occupied the roles of Validator Advisor, QA Training and Support Officer and Quality Assurance Executive Adviser. Prior to this Jan worked in various capacities in the early and middle childhood care and education fields.

I have really enjoyed writing about things I am passionate about and having the opportunity to share my passion with other people. On occasions it has been a challenge to make sure that articles are relevant for educators in all service types, and that there is a good balance between explaining theory and providing some practical examples of what this looks like in practice. It is really important that educators can see themselves implementing some of the strategies suggested.

Probably the biggest challenge has been making sure articles have some relevance for all three sectors; that a person working in family day care, long day care or an outside school hours care service can identify with the practice examples included in the article and think 'yes... that would work here' ■

Tracy Morrison



Tracy worked at NCAC as a Moderation Advisor and Moderator from 2004 to 2011. Prior to coming to NCAC, Tracy worked in a variety of teaching and management roles in community based long day care centres.

I have aimed to support educators in ways that relate to their everyday experiences in early childhood education and care environments. Writing for *Putting Children First* has allowed me to offer practical advice and guidance as well as pointing out relevant early childhood research, theories and learning materials to enhance teaching practices and future learning experiences that educators may have and/or aspire to. I have also aimed to enhance the quality of service and learning experiences had by all stakeholders in early childhood services.

Writing articles for *Putting Children First* has also provided me with valuable opportunities to keep informed about current early childhood research and theories, engage with research and learning materials and consider them from the point of view of an educator – reminding me of my teaching and learning experiences. It enabled me to stay in touch with the field and to support educators directly ■

Angela Owens



Prior to joining NCAC in 2002, Angela worked as an early childhood teacher and director in preschools and long day care services. She moved from her role of Child Care Adviser at NCAC to the role of Communications Officer in 2006. Angela is the editorial coordinator of Putting Children First.

Writing for *Putting Children First* has given me the chance to work collaboratively with lots of people, including educators in services, special education and resource agencies, children's book publishers and other NCAC staff.

Sometimes it can be easy to fall into a style of writing that is too 'wordy' and full of jargon terms which may not be universally understood. It is sometimes necessary to take a step back and really think about who will be reading the magazine and why – I often picture an educator having a quick read of an article while they are on a 10 minute tea break!

I have really enjoyed writing the articles that focus on working with children who have additional needs. Not only have these been really interesting to research, I also feel pleased that they may have helped an educator to provide a child who has additional need with positive opportunities and experiences in child care ■

Phillip Rowell



Phillip was a Communications Officer at NCAC from 2006 to 2011. Prior to this he worked as an educator in early childhood services in Western Australia while simultaneously undertaking a degree in communications and cultural studies.

Being able to write about quality practice and be an advocate for children's rights has been awesome. I think the challenge as a writer is to make sure that the key messages are clear, easy to understand and are memorable – the last thing you want is for someone to read your article and say 'what was that all about?'

The article 'Valuing male educators' (Issue 24, December 2007) was an opportunity for me to write about my experience as a man working in early childhood. If this article opened the eyes of one educator, encouraged a discussion between educators and families about the value of male educators or helped one man to feel confident in their decision to work with children, then I am very proud of what it has achieved ■