

## New horizons and strong foundations

It is our pleasure to introduce the final 2017 edition of the ANZASW Journal. It has been a tumultuous year politically, a busy year for our editorial team and, without doubt, a demanding time for all those engaged in social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, as the cliché goes, times of challenge and change can present new possibilities; magic is to be had at the ragged edges of our horizons rather than in the comfortable routines of our working lives. We think it is fair to say that social workers are entering a phase of cautious optimism about our capacity to contribute, practically and conceptually, to progressive social development in this place and at this time. Social work is a holistic undertaking in the sense that it resides in both the head and the heart: as the famous French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1999) has observed, we are heirs to a militant history of compassion. The unifying thread which connects the collection of articles offered in this edition is that they all, in differing ways, touch on how social understandings of human need can inform effective responses to contemporary practice challenges. All the offerings in this edition have some bearing on the central issue of advancing a commitment to ethical, compassionate and inclusive social work. Overall, an expansive and *hope-full* vision can be distilled: that social work is adapting and rising to the challenges before it.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, and in comparable societies, social work has weathered torrid times in recent decades; running against the wind as the state has been reshaped and as inequality has become an embedded political and economic reality. We now have a glimpse of more progressive future possibilities. However, social work has seen more than one Prague Spring. In addition to the creativity and courage needed to develop new practices for new economic and social challenges, social

workers also need lodestones to guide and anchor their work ethically and politically. We need to hold tight to values, beliefs and visions that are grounded in the lessons of the past. Accordingly, this edition contains the first offering from a new feature category: the classic book review. For future editions, we are seeking submissions for articles (no longer than 3,000 words) that review a *classic* book that has influenced the author's career in social work and/or social policy. The intent is to invite reflections from experienced practitioners on such influential texts: books that have informed, guided or motivated their journeys through social work.

For many of us, social work has involved a challenging journey, both personally and professionally. Despite experiences of sham and drudgery and the potential for broken dreams we remain committed to this resilient and sometimes beautiful profession. The mix of spirit, passion and transformation that can be found in social work is, it seems, difficult to extinguish. For some the energy needed to keep this fire burning was sparked by the written word – in the books that inspired us to dream of change in the world. There are many such classic texts in social work, sociology, politics and in other related fields – books that may have made us think, feel and imagine; words that may have given us heart and helped to sustain our hope.

The first such book reviewed here is Bailey and Brake's iconic edited text, *Radical Social Work* (1976). It is reviewed by the English social worker and author Steve Rogowski. The result is partly book review and partly a narrative of learning, experience, and sustained commitment. Steve Rogowski has been an extraordinary practitioner for over forty years – tenaciously swimming against the political and economic tide alongside his clients for much of this time. His belief in empowerment-centred practice and

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in social justice for working-class people was, in part, inspired and sustained by the socialist practice visions outlined in this text. He discusses this synergy, reflects on his own practice journey and advocates for the relevance of these aspirational writings in the here and now. Provocatively, Rogowski revisits the suggestion that social workers may legitimately operate both in and against the state; proposing that creative resistance, in alliance with those in need, can be ethically justified in times of political and managerial austerity.

The first full article presented here – “Five Years in the News” by Staniforth and Beddoe – reports on a qualitative thematic analysis of 1,512 articles featured in the *New Zealand Herald* and *Otago Daily Times* newspapers from the years 2008–2012. This research paints a picture of a profession that is both embattled and hardy. Data were generated by using the search terms “social work”; “social worker”; and “child youth and family.” Analysis reveals very limited coverage of the scope and depth of the profession and a blaming and stigmatising view of contemporary practice. Child protection is conflated with social work generally. The errors of practice and the authoritative elements of statutory social work are exaggerated at the expense of the more common practices of child and family centred resolution. However, as with much social work practice, hope is found in hidden moments: “Occasionally, a glimpse of a noble, quietly heroic social worker was shown – sitting overnight with a teenager who could not be placed in an appropriate custodial setting, saying a prayer for a promising teen, or showing a journalist, with privileged behind-the-scenes access, that specific children can be helped.” This is reminiscent of Weick’s (2000) much quoted observation that social work carries an often concealed, but ever-present, voice of everyday care and compassion.

Against the back-drop of looming mandatory registration, the influence of this limited and skewed media representation of social

work on the identity of the profession is further explored by Hobbs and Evans in their study of professional self-perceptions. Eighty-three registered, or registerable, social workers were interviewed in this study. The findings suggest that the over-identification of statutory child protection with the broader profession has impacted on practitioner perceptions of their public image, generating a degree of self-stigma. It is further reported that social workers in multi-disciplinary health settings continue to experience professional marginalisation. However, the desire to develop and project a more accurate and informed understanding of the skills, knowledge and social understandings which social work offers remains intact and there is cautious positivity about future development. A sense of engagement in the ongoing struggle to develop and assert a progressive identity continues to animate the profession.

The process of initially selecting students for admission to professional social work programmes is the topic of our next article by Hughes, Gremillion, Bridgman, Ashley, and McNabb, a group of social work educators who explore the correlation between selection processes and ultimate student success in the BSW programme at Unitec (Auckland, New Zealand). The authors conclude that current selection criteria, including interpretation of the “fit and proper” guidelines do not accurately predict student success and that adequate resourcing and support provided through the course of study offers a more effective guarantee of achievement. Something of a return to core social work values is embedded in this finding: that tertiary pedagogy in social work needs to mirror the empowering aspirations of practice to a large degree. An invitation to enter the social work profession carrying a belief in the capacity for change, and fidelity to the values of justice and inclusion is put forward by the authors.

The fourth and fifth articles in this collection concern social practice within the field of disability. Do Lan Phuong provides a comprehensive critique of the development of Australian policy, law and practice in

relation to disability services for Indigenous Australians. The analysis takes a contextual and critical approach to understanding complex social causation and the need for empowerment-centred responses, highlighting “the urgent need for disability policy improvements, and promotes further design of culturally appropriate healthcare for Indigenous populations, who are still ‘disabled’, not only by colonial histories but also their contemporary socio-economic marginalisation.” Choi, Park, and O’Brien look at the challenges involved in more effectively meeting the dual needs of migrant groups in the disability service sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. A small study of Korean immigrant parents raising children with disabilities highlights the paramountcy of trust in the professional relationship and the importance of parents’ confidence in services to fully support their children to achieve. Parents and professionals interviewed for this study cited an overemphasis on risk management and agency processes as detracting from their experiences as service users and their capacity to provide what they most want for their children – a high quality of life and a sustainable future. Challenges presented by language, cultural values and the migrant experience require a further reassertion and application of core social work practice values: power-sharing and self-determination.

The theme of working within and across cultures is further developed by Gibbs who introduces us to the experience of cross-cultural adoption. This contribution returns our gaze to social work practice with children and their families, specifically to the beautiful complexity of cross-cultural and transracial families. This author explains the fluid concepts important to a critical discussion about culture, offers her own experience of raising two adopted sons, and provides concrete guidance to cross-cultural and transracial families and professionals working alongside them. The key tasks of developing cultural identity, and promoting the development of anti-oppressive/anti-

racist attitudes are presented here as both family and community responsibilities.

Finally, to round off this assorted collection, Yeung, Good, Donoghue, Spence, and Ross tackle issues related to the ageing population in Aotearoa New Zealand and the choices made about living arrangements across the continuum from independent living within retirement villages to assisted aged care facilities. The study found that retaining dignity, strong relationships, good mental health and reducing loneliness and isolation, are understandably what matter most to residents – contributing to their sense of autonomy and well-being in retirement villages. Social workers are inconsistently employed in this growing field and it is argued that the unique social understandings and professional skills of social workers can contribute valuable expertise to transition planning and to ensuring accessibility and inclusivity of support.

In summary, this issue sketches the widening scope and diversity of social work practice, which sees social workers both adapting to, and contributing to, rapidly changing social and political landscapes. This eclectic collection of articles provides a snap-shot of the many places in which social workers interact with their communities. Complex challenges still exist: about the public portrayal of social work, about confidence in the dignity and worth of the profession, about recognition of social workers’ capacity to contribute across disciplinary settings, and across cultural and generational identities. As Rogowski illustrates in his powerful retrospective narrative, the lived experience of social workers and those who are constructed as their clients, is impacted by social, economic and political forces. We are encouraged to see beyond a managerial focus on risk management, resource allocation and production efficiency and invited to actively recognise, explore and advocate for the insights which the social work profession has to offer both those in need, and those who hold the purse strings. The contributors to this issue caution us

to keep a keen eye on how social work is defined, and who is defining it. We must be mindful not to allow the power of definition over the scope of our practice and the roles that we play to be monopolised by the state or our employers. Now, more than ever, it is important to guard and celebrate the depth and breadth of our profession and to consider the implications of our commitment to social justice. We must hold to our own sense of empowerment and autonomy, vision, solidarity and agency, if we are to enable this in others.

Bourdieu, P., Accardo, A., Balaz, G., Beaud, S., Bonvin, F., Bourdieu, E., ... Wacquant, L. (1999). *The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.

Weick, A. (2000). Hidden voices. *Social Work*, 45(5), 395–402.

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