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IASCW-IASCE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

Radisson Hotel Sligo February 25th /26th

Social Care Education & Practice - Learning Lessons Together

The opening address at the conference will be given by Professor David Divine who is the James R. Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is also Social Work Professor at Dalhousie. David is a graduate of Edinburgh University, Aston University (UK) and the London School of Economics. He has occupied senior positions in social work administration, social work education and social housing in the UK. His working life has largely been involved with the most disadvantaged communities. He has also managed his own consultancy company covering social care, social housing and health from 1994 to 2004.

Further Details on the Conference at www.iascw.ie

The Winter of Our Discontent

A sub heading for this editorial might well be “A Whole New Ball Game” but that might incur the suggestion that matters were being trivialised and taken too lightly as far as social care workers are concerned.

With a worsening economic downturn Brian Lenihan (a former Minister for Children) introduced his budget on October 14th last. Immediately affecting social care workers was the subsuming of CAAB (Children Acts Advisory Board) into the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs where it is feared its remit will be diluted. Then, what will without doubt prolong and perhaps complicate the registration process was the announcement that three new groups will ultimately fall within the remit of the Registration Council. These are the Irish Opticians Board, the Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) and the National Social Work Qualification Board. It is hardly worth repeating that the groundswell of negative opinion that surfaced in subsequent weeks was unprecedented. The Minister, while emphasising that one of the main budget aims was to protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged, announced increases in social welfare and education spending. This cut very little ice with teachers for example and protests have been continuing since, especially around losing teachers and increasing pupil class sizes.

Contrast the publicity around teachers with the situation that social care workers have found themselves in since September 2007 when the HSE recruitment embargo was announced. Laughably, this, as if you needed to be told, was initially to be for a month. The embargo drags on to the present despite union opposition. Confusion, uncertainty and an incredibly cumbersome process surrounds the recruitment situation. Add to all this the suggested savings which the HSE envisage as necessary for 2009 and it doesn't take a genius to realise that things are going to get far worse for social care provision into the future. It is no secret that child care managers around the country have been quite clear both publicly and privately that major cut backs are on the way. An example of this was contained in the opening remarks of Alex McClean, Western Area Acting Manager, to delegates attending the RMA conference in Galway in early November. The mood of delegates was sombre but also realistic.

Added to all this is the anticipated roll out of a reconfigured HSE with nine new regions replacing the current four. For many just coming to grips with the current arrangements this smacks of “making confusion more confounded.”

Another concern for example is how the many graduates emerging from social care courses around the country will get employment. If one looks at the groups coming within the Health and Social Care Professionals Council's remit for registration it is clear that by far the greatest number of those studying at the moment are in the social care area. This problem in the 1980s and early 90s was addressed to a degree with qualified workers emigrating and finding work abroad. Some of those returned to Ireland when times got better with a broadened experience and there is great benefit in that. Indeed, in hindsight, many of those who have returned would say that the necessity of emigration, while not welcome at the time, was ultimately very positive in terms of the expertise it gave. The difference now is that such an obvious answer may not be the solution as many countries where work was available in the past are in the very same recessionary situation as ourselves. One bright note may well be that many now see a good social care degree in the same light as the general BA degree in the past... a door opener to employment. Hopefully that perception will continue.

Another aspect to the current situation is that a dose of reality was badly needed in certain areas and bizarre situations which existed in recent years did little to enhance the status of social care workers. The best examples of this kind of waste would be where residential units have lain idle while staff are employed, in effect, to do nothing and cannot or will not move a few miles down the road where another unit may be in need.

We face then into an uncertain future where expectations have to be tempered with reality. However, what cannot be compromised is the delivery of services at a professional level and it is up to all of us to ensure that this fundamental baseline is maintained.

Research is a front-line activity in Social Care

by Dr. Frank Houghton

How is research viewed in Social Care? Unfortunately answers to this question are all too often along the lines of 'irrelevant', 'peripheral' or 'superfluous'. Research is usually viewed as extra work, an additional burden to already overstretched case-loads, a luxury, an ego trip, time off, a hobby-horse or a diversion. Despite such negativity, however it remains imperative that Social Care urgently expands its research base. In this paper the authors will argue not only that Social Care must improve its research base in order to protect and improve the welfare of both clients and health and social care staff, but also to promote the professionalisation and independence of social care as a discipline. In addition it will be demonstrated that social care training, experience and practice should enable social care practitioners to become highly skilled researchers, with particular strengths in qualitative research.

Why is research important in Social Care? There are many answers to this question covering a range of issues. It is of crucial importance to monitor and achieve improvements in the quality of service provided for service users/ clients. It is equally important in relation to the well-being of staff and their own professional development and careers. At an organisational level it is essential in relation to funding and publicity. Rigorous research can help develop, maintain or improve funding for agencies. The development of an evidence base can also play a role in wider social debates about the public funding of state and voluntary services, including those providing social care, who have a unique insight into the issues facing recipients of care. At present the entire health and social care sector is all too often portrayed in the media as an inefficient funding 'black hole' where additional resources yield no net gain.

Research is important in both evaluating and improving practice, as well as demonstrating practice quality. In an era of cuts and budget deficits the ability of social care programmes to demonstrate their quality, effectiveness and worth may become of paramount importance. It should be noted that VFM or Value For Money was a particularly favourite buzzword of the interim HSE. In the future funding agreements may well be tied to evidence of outcomes and effectiveness. Social care workers therefore need to be able to conduct research examining the effectiveness of their programmes, or remain dependent on other more established professions to perform this analysis for them, thus perpetuating and reinforcing current power/knowledge differentials between different professions within the multi-disciplinary teams.

Critical research and evaluation skills are also essential for social care workers to assess the outcome of research conducted by others within their ranks, and as, or possibly more importantly, to examine research conducted by those in other (more prestigious) disciplines. Few will dispute the fact that Social Care is one of the newest members of the multi-disciplinary team, and is currently struggling with the challenge of professionalisation. At present social care workers are often left to simply implement programmes developed by other disciplines, without the richness and in-depth understanding of clients that a social care input could yield. The understanding of social care of a profession, in particular, is a capacity to demonstrate its unique and successful contribution to

development of a distinct body of evidence and theory that is particular to social care, rather coming from social work, psychology, sociology or other allied areas as is currently often the case. Research from these disciplines may not yield the same kinds

noted that although successful research and publication output can improve one's own status and career prospects, more importantly, the status, prestige, respect and authority of social care as a discipline is also improved by these activities.

Research is also important to social care workers because, no matter how successful one is as a social care worker working with individual clients or groups, one's impact is, by definition, limited. However effective approaches, interventions, and programmes developed if evaluated and marketed via research publications have the potential to be adopted by numerous other social care workers and agencies and thus potentially help many more clients (thus effectively acting as a 'multiplier effect').

Another reason why research skills are crucial to social care practitioners relates to the continually evolving nature of social care work. The social care environment is extremely dynamic.

Client needs appear to be becoming ever more serious and complex and new client groups appear to be emerging all the time. Improved research skills will allow social care workers to respond to both changing client needs and changing client profiles.

What is it about social care training, practice and experience that should establish this discipline as leading researchers in the field of health and social care? Whatever research approach one uses, the main research methodologies in what is generally known as qualitative research are interviews and focus groups. Social Care practitioners should have both excellent interview and group facilitation techniques. A central focus of Social Care training and practice is on the business of communication (to a far higher degree than other disciplines within the multi-disciplinary team such as nursing or OT). Social Care practitioners therefore should have excellent verbal and non-verbal communications skills, as well as highly developed observational skills. All of these skills, which most Social Care practitioners probably take for granted, are crucial to successful qualitative research.

However the advantages that social care practitioners should have in comparison to other disciplines do not stop here. For example compared to researchers from a university/college based background in academic psychology or sociology, or researchers from some of the other disciplines within the multidisciplinary team, social care researchers trained in reflective practice should be at a distinct advantage. For example they should have greater understanding of their own emotions, mindset, prejudices, assumptions and bias. Such factors are crucial in conducting interviews, and facilitating focus groups, as well as in the in-depth and prolonged process of thematic or discourse analysis of qualitative data.

Furthermore, social care practitioners should be able to better minimise and evaluate their impact on the research 'encounter'. The essence of social care work being 'in the lifespace' of clients should also help social care researchers better understand and overcome issues of illiteracy and low levels of education and comprehension in certain populations. Academic researchers and those other disciplines with less prolonged and direct experience of clients may either tend to underestimate these issues as clients cover up such issues to save 'face', or stereotype whole groups as unable. This knowledge is important in both qualitative and more traditional quantitative (survey based) research.

Social Care researchers are of course very familiar with key ethical issues in research such as consent, coercion and confidentiality. Given their training, experience and orientation

of insight as that which social care practitioners might offer, given however social care workers should also be crucially placed to the ongoing daily interaction that they share with service users, address issues such as empowerment in the research process. which can only guide their investigations in ways which will yield Whether this is through client involvement in setting research findings and recommendations grounded in the actuality of on- agendas, facilitating clients to sit on research steering or ethics the-ground experiences with the research population. It should be committees, or client training in research methods (e.g. data

collection), or helping clients feedback on the results of research (e.g. at workshops & conferences). A background in Social Care is particularly well suited to action research, participatory research, and emancipatory research approaches.

A commonly identified weakness in current research in the health and social care sector is that of Getting Research Into Practice (GRIP). Too much research remains often remains unused and is not implemented despite clear benefits. Social care practitioners have a 'hands-on' practical orientation which lends itself to the implementation of research findings.

Research must not be seen as an extra or superfluous activity. Research is, and should be recognised as a front line activity in the health and social care sector. It is not enough to continue doing things as they were always done. Constant evaluation and for examination of social care practice and outcomes is essential to maintain and improve client wellbeing. By developing a strong and continuous base social care will enhance its claim as a profession and the funding of its programmes and approach. Social care workers are uniquely placed and skilled to develop a strong research base, particularly in the field of qualitative research.

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PROFESSOR PAT DOLAN

Congratulations are in order for Pat Dolan, Director of the Child and Family Research Centre (CRFC) in NUI Galway on his recent appointment as Professor. A further honour was bestowed when Pat recently was also appointed Chairholder for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement. It is the first such chair to be awarded in the Republic of Ireland and Pat will work with two partners, the Community Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway and Foroige, the national youth organisation to emphasise the importance of civic engagement as a policy issue education in Ireland among partner organisations and the wider international network.

The establishment of the UNESCO chair builds on the Child and Family Research Centre work at NUIG with its range of applied practice and high quality research in relation to working with young people experiencing adversity. The CRFC is internationally recognised for its expertise in the development and testing of educational models, such as youth mentoring which brings about improved outcomes for children.

Pat is a past President and PRO of the IASCW and made a significant contribution to the stability of the association at a particularly difficult time for professionals in the residential and community child care sector. Since moving into the world of academia Pat has always been available to advise and help out in whatever way possible toward ensuring the continued advancement of the IASCW. In his new position that advice and help takes on a new, enhanced dimension.

For many members of the association who know Pat the most difficult part in all of this is getting used to the term *Professor*.

Well done Pat.

BIG BROTHER, BIG SISTER

Big Brother Big Sister, Foróige's Mentoring Service.

*Volunteer to Mentor a Young Person with Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland and Foroige
– Cork, Galway, Sligo, Roscommon, Mayo, Offaly, Westmeath, Dublin, Cavan,
Monaghan and Donegal.*

This is a fantastic new volunteering opportunity for people who want to make a difference in a young person's life. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ireland's mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of young people and society through a professionally supported one-to-one relationship between a young person and older volunteer. The BBBS Programme is based on the simple idea that a friendship between an adult volunteer and a young person will contribute to the young person's development in a positive way. The programme is all about laughter, learning, friendship and most importantly, fun! We are looking for adult volunteers who have 1-2 hours a week to share with a young person. Training and ongoing support is provided for all volunteers.

Cork Office: Brenda Keating 086 8513347 and Susan Delaney 086 0412946.
For more information and contact details for your local office, see www.bbbsireland.com

Care Leavers Ireland

New charity launched for Ireland's care leavers

Care Leavers Ireland is a new charity launched at the Resident Managers Association conference held in Galway back in November. The charity is modelled on UK charity The Care Leavers Foundation, founded in 1999 to make small grants to care leavers across the UK. "The idea is very simple" said Janet Rich trustee and founder of the Care Leavers Foundation. "We make grants based on the principles of good parenting. Children brought up in public care start their adult lives with a whole panoply of disadvantages and many have no family at all to turn to. As parents we support our own children well into their twenties. There is always a bed to return to if things have gone wrong, a few quid to help get a new flat in shape, or a regular top up to help with study costs. Care leavers often have no-one they can turn to and sometimes a modest grant can make all the difference."

Care Leavers Ireland will also make small grants to care leavers up to the age of 29 on the principles of good parenting to meet a range of needs. Grant funding will be available to care leavers both to promote aspiration and to ameliorate hardship.

With the average age for children leaving home for good at somewhere between 24 and 29 across Europe (one study suggests roughly 25 for young women and 29 for young men), it is small wonder that children struggle to make this one-way transition to adult life at 16,17 or 18. Leaving care with no family to provide support, and no safety net to fall back on is tough. We know that many young care leavers in Ireland don't manage particularly well and care leavers are over represented in many sub groups of social disadvantage such as prison populations, mental health users and long term unemployed.



Small grants which help a young care leaver to get through college or university, or enable them to provide basic furnishings for their first flat can make a big difference in their lives. If you've left care and you are thinking about looking for a job, or starting a college course, this can be hard if you are returning to a bare empty flat with no bed to sleep on and no means of washing your clothes. For a young care leaver who has made it onto the ladder of higher education, having a laptop of your own, like most of the other students, and a couple of hundred Euros each term just to keep you out of debt and ensure you can buy the course books you need can significantly improve a care leaver's chance of successfully completing their degree. Help might be provided to care leavers who are struggling to purchase the clothes that they need on a low income. Smart clothes for an important interview, or something warm for the winter. Support could be given towards taking a driving test if this was a necessary requirement for a job, as this is a way of helping care leavers to pull themselves out of poverty. If it's something you would do for your own grown up child, Care Leavers Ireland would like to be able to do the same for a care leaver. Of course to do that a significant pot of money will be needed.

The fund was launched with a donation of €2,000 by Ennis businessman Brian Crowley of TTM, Ireland's biggest health and social care staffing agency and matched by care company Simplicitas. Crowley has pledged to raise a further €8,000 by the end of the year from local businesses and the fund will open to applicants early in the New Year. Care Leavers Ireland will eventually need to raise in the region of €30,000 a year to meet the level of applications that is anticipated once the grants scheme becomes widely known.

To find out more about Care Leavers Ireland, or to make a donation, contact janet.rich@thecareleaversfoundation.org or visit www.thecareleaversfoundation.org

CAAB's Demise?

Under the 2006 Criminal Justice Act what was the Residential Services Board (SRSB) became the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB). There was a strong sense of much needed optimism when the SRSB was established that its remit would ensure the best use, monitoring and delivery of residential places where that need was most evident. In attempting over a number of years to come to grips with such a necessary, if complicated system it faced new adjustments under the 2006 Act referred to above. Now this organisation is going through another transformation. On the eve of its 2008 Annual Conference CAAB was informed that, as part of the previous day's budget provisions, it was to be subsumed into the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The anticipated effect of this is the dismantling of a service that specifically concentrated on all aspects of legislation as it affected children. While expertise gained will transfer there is every fear that a dilution of the service as it was intended is now inevitable. Will, for example, the implications of reports published over the years by the SRSB / CAAB around contentious areas such as *High Support*, *Special Care*, *Physical Restraint Guidelines*, etc. now be consigned to history or will the reviews promised in the case of some be honoured?

Shelter in a Storm : Swedish Sanctuary for Troubled Youth

By Emer Woodful

Emer Woodful is a barrister.
This article first appeared in
The Irish Times.

Dreamy Gotland. The door of the pink wooden cottage with the white trim is open. All you can hear is birdsong. Outside the apple blossom trees bow under the weight of the abundant pale pink and white blossoms. Lilacs nod lazily in the breeze. Hassleless Hassela. Can it be so in a centre for troubled youths, most of whom are referred by the police, and where two Irish youths who had appeared before the courts were previously placed?

"I was afraid before I came here, says 26 year old Yvonne Gaule a mature student in Arts and Social Studies at Cork Institute of Technology who is just completing a three months placement, "because I'd heard about staff being attacked in youth residential facilities and when I saw students freely using knives in the kitchen for example I was worried, but it's all so calm. We haven't seen any violence in the past three months apart from some small occasional arguments between students. But the staff always intervene immediately and say, hey stop that, and they do. This place has totally changed my view about how to work with troubled youths. The Minister for Justice has to come here and see it. I'm going to hound him when I get home!"

Her fellow student 26 year old Claire O'Dowd chips in *"Before I came here I saw the DVD and said it can't be that good, it must be some kind of a cult or something but of course it's not at all and having seen it close up I am totally taken with it"*.

O' Dowd adds, *"Until you realize you have problem you can't resolve it. It's very far from a holiday camp here. They have to do the work on themselves."*

Hassela Gotland started 25 years ago when a married couple Lasse and Kirstin Siggelin then teachers in a rural school in a tiny village on the island of Gotland off the coast of Sweden adopted two children from Colombia. They were asked to take more and more children and the Hassela Gotland project was born. 700 youths aged between 12 and 20 have passed through its very wide doors. It is privately run without any state funding although the state pays for any children it sends there. Employing a staff of 100, it has its own school with customized programmes, an adventure centre, a top class music studio, and it provides vocational training in its dog training centre, bakery business and coffee shop, horticulture centre, carpentry centre, clothing design workshop and its Avoca Handweavers style shop. It is regularly audited by the Swedish authorities and only one complaint against it was ever upheld. The complainant in that instance, a Vietnamese authority, still refers youths to Hassela. Almost half the children at Hassela come from outside Sweden. It is full to its capacity of 60 at the moment and has an immediate waiting list of 15.

Hassela Gotland is unique in that all the students live with families most of whom have children. Staff live in large beautifully decorated houses owned by Hassela, and work 6 weeks on 2 weeks off. It costs about a third of the cost of similar care in Ireland. That may be explained by the fact that one person covers what would require three shifts in Ireland.

"That's what's really different about this place," says Affi a 28 year old graduate of Hassela of Turkish origin, now a drama teacher who has 7 students living with her and her husband and young baby and who had been through eight schools before arriving in Hassela at 15 years of age. "We are with the students 24/7. There's no shift change, so the students can't run away from their problems. We don't believe that you need to punish a child to teach them the difference between right and wrong. We are always with them, if they are angry we stay with them." Affi says, *"The most important thing we do is listen, listen, listen. Sometimes parents are so busy they don't make time to do this. We also challenge behaviour and we also work hard on finding what interests the kids."*

Lasse Siggelin looks at it this way. *"Some say if you give a finger*

they will take your hand, I say if you give a finger you will get a hand."

Siggelin believes that discipline and control are important. *"Social accountability is vital, he says, you always have a choice. We work on developing appropriate behaviour by focussing on and growing the normal and then dealing with the abnormal with the experts"*. There are 2 psychologists on site.

One of the most interesting aspects of Hassela is the dog training centre. It is based around a beautiful big traditional style wooden villa house which also contains the apartment home of 28 year old Alex Siggelin and his dog psychologist wife Erica and their new baby. Alex and his wife live, work and eat with the students.

"They are coming to my home", says Alex, "and they can be part of that but there are rules."

Here students with ADHD work with Alex in training German Shepherd dogs that are sold mainly to the Swedish police. They are also used as sniffer dogs to check for drugs in the houses when students have been away on home visits or when there are new arrivals. Alex was a street child in Bogota until the age of 5 when he was adopted by the Siggelins. Now he could write the parenting manuals.

"Every child who comes here is scared," he says. "The faster you can help the child feel secure the faster you can start working with him or her."

A routine helps the child feel secure. Some children are given dogs to care for and are allowed to keep them overnight in cages in their rooms. This removes the need for any arguments about getting up in the morning. *"You can't negotiate with a dog. The dog has to be fed and exercised so you just have to get up. You can't be angry around a dog or they'll get agitated. The kids know this and they learn to become aware of and to amend their hyperactive behaviour. They calm down"*

Calm people calm dogs. Hassela dogs also get 24/7 care. Alex moved furniture into the kennels, a TV, settees, kettles and cups, so that students could sit with the dogs as much as possible. *"This makes our dogs more sociable," he says. "They are better able to adapt to change when they have had a lot of close human contact. Just like us. The security forces love our dogs. They say they are adaptable, that they are able to miss feeding times if necessary without getting agitated when they are out on a job."*

The kennels is purposely painted a calm yellow. *"When I visited Ireland", says Alex, "I couldn't believe the walls of the court were painted blue. Wrong colour, a cold colour. Should be green maybe, calmer."*

Alex says we can learn a lot from the behaviour of the wolf, the forerunner of the dog.

"Like us the wolf is a pack animal who always look after the injured one in the pack. The more you take away from the wolf the angrier he'll be. He screams, Survive, Survive, Survive. The wolf will do whatever benefits his survival. Likewise the children who come here have often lost everything. You must reward them and when they then see the benefit of what they're doing, they'll do it."

Valdes is a 20 year old youth who he was abandoned as a child in Lithuania, and lived in an orphanage until he was adopted by a Swedish couple. He was a heavy user of cannabis since he was 13. *"I ended up shaking and screaming and thinking about cannabis all day"* he says. He has been "clean" since coming to Hassela last December. Today he sits in the little green wooden chalet with the white trim proudly showing me the 9 young puppies with whom he shares his room with mother Sita on a lead. *"I am so happy," he*

says. *"The dogs are my friends. I am now getting a job working with the dogs. I never dreamed that could be possible."*

Alex and Erica are about to head off on a week holidays to stay with Erica's parents on the mainland. However they are worried about leaving a very troubled 15 year old who arrived the day before. He had assaulted a social worker and had set fire to a car prior to his arrival. The boy with the spikey blonde hair is crouched down cooing and playing with 6 months old baby Theo. So what do they do? Well of course they take him with them! Alex will check into a nearby hostel to see how things go with the boy. *"So what if I can't have a beer with my father in law? No big deal. I do such interesting work and I have fun doing it, and thanks to these kids I have one of the best dog training facilities in the world."*, he says.

I have been here before assisting in assessing Hassela Gotland. This time I'm taking a wider look and am helping in the making of a web film with Guardian films, London.

It's Friday evening. That means dress up time. Every Friday evening there's a special dinner in the light filled glass walled main restaurant built around a living walnut tree.

There are candles and pretty white flowers on all the tables covered in pale yellow linen tablecloths. Tonight a former student of Algerian origin is being honoured. He had dropped out of Hassela, had come back, has just graduated and is off to university. He is radiant amidst the speeches, hugs and presents.

We meet David Clubb from the Shetland Islands who has referred children to Hassela and who's work as a social worker for 18 years included a spell in the very traditional youth detention centres Barlinne in Glasgow.

"When I was a student there was a cheap college trip going to Hassela Gotland for 10 days for £50. I came and it changed my life." he says.

David who has a young family also fosters a troubled teenager. He is back visiting Hassela for a week with his foster child to refuel himself. What about the view that it's too late to be intervening with teenagers? *"I think that's a dreadfully pessimistic view."*, he says *"What do you do, do nothing?"* And what of the nature versus nurture argument?

"Well there's nothing you can do about nature so let's do something about nurture".

The bottom line he says is *"this place bloody works"*!

It seems to. Research done by child psychologist Steffan Levin in association with Stockholm University shows that 90% of the girls and 53% of the boys who had been in Hassela Gotland in 2003/04, giving an overall rating of 68% described themselves as being *"well established, drugs free and not involved in crime."*

Tom Tuite in his book *Minor Offences, Ireland's Cradle of Crime* says that *"about half of teenagers held in the state's most secure unit for young offenders under the age of 16 Trinity house in Lusk in later years end up in adult prisons or are homeless within a short time of their release."*

It is perhaps the quality of the improvements here that is so amazing. We later meet 32 year old Tanya Malas of Serbian background a graduate of Hassela who became an air steward, trained as a pilot and who has moved back to run the horticulture centre. She is married with two young children and lives in the capital, Visby. Tanya came to Hassela Gotland when she was 15 and was drinking heavily having dropped out of school. Tanya's mother had committed suicide when she was a baby.

"Everyone who comes here has a big person missing in their lives. There is an empty room in your heart, even if you don't admit it," she says. *"Most parents of the children here use alcohol or drugs and may be divorced. Hassela gave me love, rules and listened to me when I was sad. Most of my former friends in Stockholm are dead, or are in jail. Only one has a good life I think."*

28 year old Jeremy Brookes a recent psychology graduate and a

radio station manager was a serious heroin addict who detoxed on the long flights from Sydney 8 years ago.

"I was 8 and a half stone when I got to Hassela, and I'm over 6 ft tall. I had been in 15 rehab centres," says Brookes, *"Drugs were on my mind from morning to night. I'd be dead if I hadn't come here. The thing about this place is they persist with you. I remember being in a centre in Australia and I told the nurse my wallet had been stolen and that I was leaving. She said, okay, I'll order a taxi. That would never happen here. The other thing is you're integrated into the wider community here. You're mixing in the real world all the time and dealing with it I know I'll make mistakes in my life but I now know I can work through them."*

A beaming Jeremy and his wife are expecting their first baby any day.

But not all youths who pass through Hassela end up on such a path. One of the Irish youths who went to Hassela Gotland is now in prison in Ireland. *"Yes I know,"* says Brookes, *"he still writes handwritten letters to me. I believe you know he will come good. I think he realizes there is another life."*

The circumstances of some cases however are even too much for Hassela Gotland. Hassela believes that for a placement to have a chance at all the student must commit to staying for at least a year, that the parents in the home country need flexible support to be held through any tearful home sick phone calls, and that some times on home visits the students may need to stay in accommodation away from their family to keep a sense of perspective, but to visit them and dip in and out. If the student is a voluntary admission and if the parents of a student arrive drunk or drugged and if they insist on taking the child home, what chance has anyone? Hassela also believes that maybe if students stay for 2 years or so they may be better going home to a foster family or to independent living rather than straight back into dysfunction, if at all.

There is of course disagreement among care professional and lawyers as to whether Irish children should be sent abroad for care. Campaigners say troubled minors should be able to receive appropriate care in Ireland, near their family. The HSE has always contended that it is in the context of a minor requiring what they consider to be specialist treatment the provision of which the population numbers here would not justify. Finbarr O'Leary Deputy Chief Executive of the Children Acts Advisory Board says that *"it is always a last resort, done with the agreement of the child, in consultation with the family in the best interests of the child in circumstances where other programmes were tried and may not have had the results expected."*

It's time to leave and it's back to the Irish care worker students. What was the highlight of their trip that's about to end? *"Oh for me,"* says Claire O'Dowd *"it was my first hug here. Yes, I felt this is good and natural"*

Yvonne Gaille says *"we were shocked when we saw students being hugged given our history of child care in Ireland. Anywhere I've worked discouraged hugging and advised that you discourage any hug and keep a record of it. We also had a problem being hugged ourselves, but the kids said they were here to help us open up!"* They're laughing about this now.

O'Dowd says *"I feel I have developed. We were like sticks when we came and hugging was so natural for them"*. Although sexual relationships are forbidden between staff and students and between students had they seen any inappropriate touching over the 3 months? *"No not at all"* they say.

We leave them musing about how they could change their plane tickets to stay a little longer.

Could a similar centre ever work in Ireland. *"I don't see why not"* says Jeremy Brookes, *"but it would have to be carefully thought out."*

In God We Doubt by John Humphrys (Hodder 2008)

John Humphrys is one of the most respected journalists and broadcasters in the UK. He may be better known to those on this side of the water as the question master in the long running BBC series *Mastermind*. He has considered himself an atheist and the subtitle of this book is *Confessions of a Failed Atheist*. Having read the book one can see how he might have arrived at that subtitle but don't jump to conclusions!

In his award winning series on BBC Radio 4 *Humphrys in Search of God* he challenged religious leaders of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths to prove that God exists. The response to the programmes was the biggest he had ever received in nearly half a century of journalism and some of those responses are built into the book. Not all of them will surprise the reader as we have all wrestled at some time or other with the themes covered. The programmes and the response raised other interesting questions for him and he develops his arguments around the revealing interviews he carried out and his own perceptions and experiences garnered over many years.

Should this book be of interest to social care workers? In a general sense yes but it may not bring any answers and will not, at the end of the day, help them cope with the difficulties that present themselves if they work with children for example. What is the social care worker's responsibility in relation to religious practice for children in his / her care in a multi ethnic Ireland where traditional religious observance has changed so much over recent years? Over many years we probably all have been party to arguments and discussions on a Sunday morning in the workplace or at meetings around whether or not the children in our care should be allowed make up their own minds about going to mass for example. One argument often made in those discussions is that if a non Christian child were to come into our care we would jump through hoops to ensure that their religious needs were met but we are often quite blasé about the religious needs of those children who may, for example, be Catholics.

In God We Doubt is not a long weighty tome full of theological detail. While there is the odd convoluted bit it opens up anew, or maybe reopens for some, the fundamental questions that so many of us battle with at times. For example, in the recent Baby P case in England could one not be forgiven for questioning the existence of a God, just and merciful as all major religions appear to teach, that would allow the horror of that case and of course many others of varying degrees of savagery around the world.

Humphrys's essential argument is that it's pretty easy being a fundamentalist but also it's pretty easy being an atheist. Why? Because either stance can have holes picked in their credo on any number of levels. He refers to Richard Dawkins author of *The God Delusion* and one of the world's best known atheists who appears obsessive in scathingly decrying the idea of a personal god. His book is a bestseller and Humphrys admires greatly the sheer force of his arguments which might well have the waverers among us opting for Dawkins brand of atheism. But, Humphrys then goes on to ask will it lead anyone to maintain that Dawkins is right after all and decide that "my Bible's going in the bin?"

If anything, Humphrys is writing to question the very belief or lack of it that he finds himself with after a traditional Christian upbringing in Wales with church, ritual, clergy and prayer very much part of his formative years. Interestingly, he finds his son of six proclaiming a belief in God and he, his father, unable to determine quite how this came about since neither at home or school was very much done to indoctrinate him in any religious belief. It's almost an argument for the author to suggest that somewhere as we grow and develop so does a sense of an outside being emerge for all of us. Can that however be as simple as it is or

do those who decry the decline of organised religion have a point when they argue that without nurturing faith in the young it is lost forever with all the predictable amoral attitudes and actions resulting in what they see as a world without morality, decency and even law and order today?

As often with a good book there are perhaps more questions than answers here and while some critics from religious academia have been less than flattering about *In God We Doubt* it does attempt to ask, if not answer, the questions that many have in today's world. His last paragraph aptly sums up what many may well conclude having read what he has to say.

Esther v The PC Brigade (ITV)

Esther Rantzen was instrumental in setting up Childline in 1986 in the UK. While that initiative, looked at with some scepticism at the time, has been of major benefit in giving children who might be in danger a lifeline, she has had reason to dwell on where she now sees child protection. Thus the above programme seen recently on ITV's *Tonight* programme.

Her basic question is one with which many here in Ireland will concur. Is political correctness and a culture of Health & Safety doing more harm than good where children are concerned? In our zeal to ensure that children are protected are we in fact being abusive in another way... denying children the right to grow up in a normal atmosphere. If what the programme portrayed is anything to go by the answer is quite clear and begs another question – when is somebody going to shout stop? The statistic of only 29% of children enjoying adventures in natural outdoor environments and 21% banned from playing conkers at school puts her view in perspective. In 2007 3.5 million children in the UK did not take part in school games or sports. Disturbing examples were given of where society is now at when it comes to how children are seen... not as vulnerable and needing an instinctive response from adults to protect them but rather a fear of how the helping adult (especially a man) is seen.

The father of a special needs child tells his daughter to make sure she puts sun cream on when she went on a school trip to the seaside. She returned home with her back blistered from the sun. When he asked why no one put sun cream on her back the child replied that the teachers were not allowed to do it because of "child protection." The father thought it amounted to neglect rather than child protection and it's hard to disagree. A coroner spoke of a case where a two year old child had wandered out of a crèche on to a road and was passed by a motorist who, at the inquest, said he was afraid to stop in case he might be suspected of being a child abductor. The child drowned shortly after in a nearby pond. A granny playing at building a den with her grandson is reported to the police who arrive, question her and follow both back to the child's house. Two old ladies taking a photograph of an empty pool in a park are questioned by a park attendant as to why they are doing so. The manager of centre for autism who has responsibility for five different areas in the organisation has to be vetted five times because of her five areas of responsibility.

An experiment conducted for the programme raises many questions particularly if you are a parent of young children and one of them were to get lost in a shopping centre. We would hope that the response in an Irish context might be different but can we really be so sure? Two child actors pretended to be lost and distressed in a large shopping centre while being filmed to see how adults would respond. Unbelievably, only five people out of over 1800 who had passed by actually tried to help.

This programme left one reeling and wondering where do we go from here. It appears that there never was such a plethora of

agencies, monitors, inspectors, experts and legislation to protect children and yet in all of that the child's need to be child seems very far from where it should be. Soon to be added here, though gone from the political agenda at the moment, is the referendum on children's rights. Again there have been suggestions, at one level with very good reason (remember Soham and school caretaker Ian Huntly?), that "soft information" may well find its way into staff vetting procedures in Ireland.

One of the interesting aspects that surfaces when we, normal adults as we consider ourselves and no matter at what level of responsibility we work, discuss all this there is no disagreement but that things have gone too far and this is not a denial that there are adults out there who do not have children's best interests at heart by a long shot. Neither, unfortunately is there any disagreement on our and society's lack of ability to counteract what is an insidious, counterproductive intrusion into the lives of children in public in the guise of protecting them at one level and a lack of real, natural care on the other as evidenced in the shopping centre experiment.

This programme, in which Esther Rantzen admits that she is responsible to some degree for where we now have come to because of her concern for children in the mid 1980's, makes a valuable contribution to this debate.

by Noel Howard

Snippets . . .

Taken from various news and media sources

Children First Guidelines:

Ombudsman, Emily Logan announces investigation into how Children First is being implemented by the HSE. Ms Logan says that she is "concerned about the partial or non-implementation of these guidelines by the HSE and how this could result in systemic deficits in the management and care of children."

Baby P... Could it happen here?

Public and political outrage surrounds the horrific life and death of the child known as Baby P following convictions of his abusers in London. Haringey Local Authority and its child protection officials are at the centre of the controversy and details have emerged of professionals and neighbours / family who, it is claimed, must have known about the abuse being inflicted on the child but failed to act. The Head of Children's Services and a number other senior staff involved in the case have been suspended. It also emerges that a "whistleblower's" concerns which were put in writing a number of months before the child's death were not acted on. Further controversy surrounds the case in view of Barnardo's (UK) chief Martin Narey's comment "the probability is that, had Baby P survived, he might have been unruly by the time he reached the age of 13 or 14. At which point he'd have become feral, a parasite, a job." The UK Health Minister has ordered a review of social work training and says that a radical overhaul of how social workers are taught and trained will result.

Children & Video Link Evidence:

David Ogg QC, who has prosecuted a number of high profile child abuse cases in Scotland claims that evidence given by video link can make the victim seem remote and depersonalised and a lot of non verbal information and cues are lost in the ether. He was addressing a conference in Dublin in November on The Voice of the Child in The Criminal Justice System. He also warned about the uncritical acceptance of "child abuse syndrome" without hard and fast, thorough and peer reviewed research.

Pre School Children Suspended:

The Northern Ireland Assembly has been told that between 2002 and 2007 some 31 pre school children were suspended and 1 expelled for physical and verbal attacks on staff. A union representative claimed the numbers given do not reflect the true scale of the problem at pre-school level.

MTFC

The HSE has announced that it will no longer send "highly troubled" children abroad. This follows much criticism in recent years of this practice which was seen, quite rightly, as an indictment on the state's lack of ability and /or willingness to cope effectively with some troubled children. A new foster care programme –multi dimensional treatment foster care (MTFC)-is currently being piloted in Mullingar with availability subsequently in Dublin. (See Emer Woodfull's article) We hope to have a review of this service in the next edition of CURAM.

What Next?

In the House of Lords, Baroness Morgan, Education Minister said that pupils as young as 5 will be allowed tell teachers what they feel about various aspects of school life from school uniforms to how they are being taught and not just about "what colour the walls should be painted." Guidelines have already been issued to schools saying that pupils can have a role in recruiting staff and observing lessons to give feedback on how well they believe they are being taught. Teachers' representatives in the UK have described the move as the "lunatics taking over the asylum."

Teenage Crime:

According to the Department of Justice there has been a significant increase in the number of teenagers being referred to the garda juvenile diversion programme. In 2005 there were over 17,000 cases referred, in 2006 over 20,000 and in 2007 nearly 22,000. The rise in numbers comes despite the number of projects almost doubling since 2005.

Out Of Hours Service for Teenagers:

Some confusion surrounds the move to Portrane in Dublin for St. Jude's Residential Unit and Park View. With these units moving there was an understandable concern that emergency services for 12-18 year olds at night would be located many miles from the city centre. It now emerges that there will still be two facilities in the city centre for out of hours referrals. The relocated centres to be known as "Grove House" in Portrane will be for crisis intervention.

Begging:

The Government is introducing legislation to deal with begging. Imprisonment or a fine of €700.00 will be the penalty for those found guilty of intimidatory behaviour while begging. There has been a mixed reaction to this new law with some saying it's a poor reflection on our attitude toward the less well off. Another take on it all is who would beg if they can afford to pay a fine of €700.00? Others justified the law on the basis that some beggars can and do intimidate and there is a growing problem of "organised" begging gangs.

MySpace Court Case:

A woman in the US who was involved in creating a fake MySpace persona to woo a vulnerable 13 year old neighbour and the ended the relationship abruptly was convicted of three misdemeanours but escaped a potential 20 year sentence on being acquitted of a felony charge in the case. Hours after the fake relationship was ended 13 year old Megan Meier hanged herself.

“MANY MILES ON THE CLOCK”

Looking at these two photographs you would never think that between them Di and Anne have spent nearly 55 years in direct work employment as social care workers. In fact they were around when the term social care worker was not yet thought of, let alone invented. If you ever get a chance to sit down with either of them you will get a fascinating glimpse into a world of care, with all its complexities, before policies, inspections, monitoring, mentoring, supervision and all the other features now judged essential to ensure that our system of care is the best there is were in place.

Anne Fitzgerald

Anne Fitzgerald's formal introduction to the academic side of social care began in 1988 following many years of work at community and youth level in a voluntary capacity. Her first placement from Cork IT was with the Good Shepherd Services and in 1994 she became the first lay manager in Edel House, Cork, which cared for homeless women and children. She got her degree in 1998 with best thesis prize as an added bonus. Currently, Anne is a residential manager with CSI services. Gardening is Anne's way of relaxing when not at work.



Deirdre (Di) Murphy

Deirdre (Di) Murphy has nearly 34 years service in St. Joseph's School, Ferryhouse, Clonmel. Like Anne, she would have been no stranger in the past to looking after 14 or 15 children on her own. She has seen numerous changes in those years with her workplace changing hands from the Rosminian Order to the Department of Education and in March 2007 to the HSE. Di is a graduate of WIT and is a TCI instructor. Currently she is a Care Manager in St. Joseph's. To “get away from it all” Di walks in the lovely Comeragh and Knockmealdown mountains which are on her doorstep.

HSE “REGIONS” UPDATE

Very little publicity was given to a HSE announcement on Thursday night December 10th. indicating that a decision on the new regional structures to streamline the organisation had been deferred. Up to now the anticipation was that an announcement on the composition and geographical extent of the new regions would be made before Christmas.

Though the view is that there will be nine new regions to replace the current four but confirmation on that will have to wait too.

That will not now happen and all the HSE would say was that further work needed to be carried out.

The effect of this really is that the limbo situation HSE workers and management all over the country are in will continue with no new date for an official announcement given.

A call to the HSE press office simply elicited the response that nothing further beyond what was already stated on December 10th would be forthcoming until more definite details were available.



Orchard Childrens Services

Orchard children's services are delighted to be in partnership with the IASCW. We value the input that social care workers have in the front line delivery of care services in an ever changing Ireland. We feel there is a shared belief between orchard children's services and the IASCW in the drive to give the best services to the young people in our care and recognize the environment in which it has to be done.

Orchard Children's Services are an independent childcare company which was set-up in Ireland in October 2003. Orchard Children's Services is 'not for profit' organization which means that all profits are ploughed back in to the company to secure resources for children and staff.

We value each individual child and believe in providing the best possible care to young people in our service. Once a young person feels safe and secure in their placement, we then work to provide them with the opportunity to grow and realize their full potential. We believe that every young person has the potential to make changes in their lives and we aim to help them identify positive changes for the future.

Orchard Children's Services were founded on these core values:

- 1) Children have the right to a high standard of physical and emotional care;
- 2) Children have the right to a stable, stimulating and caring environment in which to grow and develop, physically, intellectually and emotionally;
- 3) Children have a right to be respected for who they are and for what they can become;
- 4) All children, regardless of their different cultures, individual needs, are entitled to be nurtured and so empowered to achieve their full potential.

We look forward to the future and sharing the challenges ahead.

Carol Lander Canice Robinson