

## Editorial

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of volume 31 of Research, Policy and Planning. In this edition we have four papers, each reflecting different topical issues within the field of social work and social care. Three of these are based on literature reviews: two scoping reviews, one systematic review, and a fourth offers a review of policy.

The first paper, by **Jill Manthorpe and Ann Bowling**, is concerned with how to measure the quality of life of those who care for people living with dementia. Drawing on a scoping review for the Medical Research Council to determine 'state of the art' ways of measuring the quality of life of carers, they suggest there is both a dearth of carer-reported quality of life measures (compared with the large number of proxy measures to assess the quality of life of the person with dementia) and a lack of consensus about *what* to measure and *how* for carers of people with dementia, which is not helpful for practitioners or those responsible for funding services.

The second paper, from **Kate Baxter**, is also based on a scoping review of research evidence about adults in England who self-fund their own care. Self-funders have been largely overlooked by researchers even though (as the paper itself observes) both the number and proportion of self-funders is increasing, partly as a result of tightening eligibility criteria. Baxter's paper, based on a review of 76 studies that met the review criteria, offers a useful synthesis of what is currently known. It highlights challenges facing local authority adult social care departments after the 2014 Care Act, in providing appropriate advice to this group and in market 'shaping' to respond to the needs of self-funders. This paper offers valuable insights for local authority and other staff working in the fields of communications and those responsible for commissioning and planning services.

The third paper is based on another literature review: a systematic review of literature in an (arguably) even less well researched field: the factors influencing decision making by children aged between 8-12 in child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). This paper, by **Ann Cox, Chris Brannigan, Martyn Harling and Michael Townend**, focuses on an important gap in evidence to inform practice. Though there is significant legal guidance and case law to support and guide clinicians and practitioners in assessing whether young people aged over 13 are able to make informed decisions about their own healthcare, for younger children the guidance is unclear; and as the authors point out, this can lead to professional anxiety and a tendency to 'default to parental consent'. To remedy this, they review 12 studies to suggest six factors that influence the process of assessing the competence of younger children to make decisions: consent competence and capacity, best interests, communication, risks and conflicts, legal frameworks and the parental role. The authors conclude that though in law children are not allowed to refuse treatment, involving them in decision making where possible is 'good practice', and supports the child's empowerment and participation. The authors conclude by calling for a better understanding of the training requirements that would support the skills of clinicians working with children in this age group. This paper would be of particular interest to social work, nursing, or allied clinical professionals working in the field of child mental health.

The fourth and final paper is from **Michelle Cornes, Helen Mathie, Martin Whiteford, Jill Manthorpe and Mike Clark**. Their paper, originally written as a briefing report for homelessness organisations and subsequently developed into a journal article, focuses on the implications of the 2014 Care Act for homeless people. The paper argues that prior to the 2014 Act, homeless people were deemed ineligible for publicly funded care and support: a situation that contributed to the creation of the *Supporting People* programme and the provision of 'housing related support'. Though *Supporting People* has been one of the casualties of the Government's public sector austerity policies, the paper draws attention both to opportunities

for using Care Act legislation to obtain services for homeless people, whilst at the same time offering a critical analysis of barriers – some more apparent than real – to using the Care Act to support the needs of this group. Cornes *et al.* call for homelessness organisations to develop closer working relationships with local authority care managers and social workers, and to be more actively involved at local levels in the Act's implementation. This paper will be interesting and useful particularly for local and independent sector workers working with homeless people.

These four papers are followed by the three reviews. The first, by Serge Paul, considers two recently published books which form part of the Critical and Radical Debates in Social Work series edited by Ian Ferguson and Michael Lavalette: *Poverty and Inequality* by Chris Jones & Tony Novak and *Children and Families* by Paul Michael Garrett. (The other four volumes in this series, on Personalisation, Mental Health, Adult Social Care and Ethics have been reviewed in previous editions of RPP). Reviews of two other books: *Social Work with Troubled Families* (editor Keith Davies, 2015) and *Vulnerability and Young People: Care and Social Control in Policy and Practice* (Kate Brown, 2015) by Andy Pithouse are also included.

Finally, Editors would like to express our grateful thanks to Dr Chris Rainey for his wise counsel over the past several years on RPP's Editorial Board. Chris retired recently and has resigned from the Board. We will also miss Colin Kelsey, another long-standing Editorial Board member, who died suddenly earlier in the year.

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