

Protecting the Public – Enhancing the Profession



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2 It takes a village to protect a child

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Abstract

This article presents a case for taking a concerted community approach to protecting children. It does this through acknowledging that: child protection is indeed 'everyone's business' (Landgren, 2005) and extending this into promoting a collective response rather than relying solely on child protection authorities to work with individual families; revisiting the 'best interests' criterion of child rights in protecting children; reiterating the argument (Young, McKenzie, Omre, Schjelderup, & Walker, 2014) for a much more nuanced understanding of, and response to, keeping children safe; and presenting some descriptions and analyses of community approaches to protecting children.

Keywords: community child protection, child rights, community development, developmental child protection

Introduction

In this paper we argue that taking a community perspective is essential for protecting children. In this we are not alone. Others (Hudson, 1999; Jack & Gill, 2010; Wright, 2004) have argued similarly, providing various frameworks and strategies. We aim to add to this body of knowledge for use in practice. As social work educators in Western Australia with practice backgrounds in community development we have observed and participated in some community-based activities and programmes for children which we believe can contribute to the protection of children. These protective aspects of community development work are embodied in the collective and relational work of providing supportive environments in which people in vulnerable situations have a sense of safety. Leading child protection advocate, Dorothy Scott (O'Donnell, Scott, & Stanley, 2008; Scott, 1992) has long argued for the use of a public health model for dealing with child abuse and neglect, the primary prevention focus of which encompasses collective and relational aspects.

While still modest, the Australian literature contains some significant examples such as those reported in Beilharz (2002), Mondy and Mondy (2004) and Pathways to Prevention (O'Donnell et al., 2008) which provide positive illustrations of the success of programmes predominantly operating at the primary end of the prevention continuum. The emphasis is on universal and collective approaches to providing services and engaging in building supportive local relationships a fundamental principle of developmental community practice. This differs significantly from the typical Australian system "which functions on a risk-dominated, forensic approach to notifications of suspected abuse and neglect" (Kojan & Lonne, 2012, p. 98). Taking this view of the potential for a primary prevention approach (which nevertheless can operate to address the potential for harm as demonstrated in the examples referred to above), we suggest that it may be in the informal, rather than the formal or mandated, relationships that the protection of children may be effected. It is our argument that the 'best interest' criterion often cited as the rationale for statutory intervention as the strategy of choice may well be improved by taking a community approach to child protection.

In this paper we outline our approach by describing the principles of a community development (CD) approach to child protection, arguing that it ill-serves children and families to keep these two practice domains separate and in opposition. A brief examination of the connection between a child rights approach and child protection sets the scene for illustrating opportunities presented and taken which could be further enhanced by adopting a framework (Young et al., 2014) for practice based on CD principles. Central to this approach is the inter-weaving of a child rights approach with community development. Examining the most recent policy practice direction in Western Australia, the use of the Signs of Safety (SoS) framework, and other examples we apply the framework for practice developed by Young et al. (2014) to demonstrate the potential this framework has to enhance child protection practice.

Child rights and child protection

Most child rights for child protection (Farrell, 2004) arguments raise the 'best interests' criterion (Article 3) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)(United Nations General Assembly, 1989). While other rights are cited, such as the right to identity, participatory rights are the least promoted (Holland, 2001) for children as well as parents. The legal framework for rights-based work focuses mainly on the first-generation rights which are protective (Young et al., 2014), contrasting with 'third generation', or participatory rights, which are least employed in child protection work. While children's participation in WA is authorised by the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (CCSA) (CCSA, 2004) it remains a largely insoluble undertaking to have children participate in a way that is not mediated by adults in some way. All information emanates from the adult environment and there is the additional problem of adults assessing what age and maturity level constitutes a child's ability to fully participate (CCSA, 2004 [S.10(a) (b)]). Other salient rights (UNCROC Articles 18 and 19) concern the state's responsibility to provide adequate support for parents whose children are in its care. In western countries, resources, policy directions, public sentiment and, often, practitioner attention to risk rather than prevention dictate a 'risk-averse' response as the first option (Gillingham & Bromfield, 2008; Price-Robertson & Bromfield, 2011). This is supported by the interpretation of 'best interests' where the child is removed from harm or the potential for harm. This is undoubtedly necessary in some cases. We agree with Young et al. (2014) when they argue for a much more nuanced approach to child protection, both in predicting risk and when constructing strategies to respond to concerns of child harm and safety. We suggest that child-protection workers could be assisted to extend their options when working with protective demands by considering the strategies offered by a combination of child-rights Articles and particularly focusing on participatory or collective third-generation rights. Applying a 'best interests' approach, we maintain, requires more than the assessment of risk and taking protective action. It requires using participatory measures in addition to the provision strategies (second-generation rights in Young et al., 2014) by attending to a combination of the Articles in the Convention. These authors identify key elements to assist in this work which are drawn from community development principles. We discuss the application of community approaches to child protection next.

Community approaches to child protection

A useful framework to start considering child protection through a community development lens is reproduced below from the adaptation in Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup, & Omre (2012). One well-known example in Australia of a programme intended to contribute to child well-being is the Community for Children (CfC) initiative under the umbrella Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (Department of Family and Community Services, 2002). This programme was designed to be implemented by local organisations in collaboration with their local communities and was expected to include standard activities which were considered by government to be beneficial, such as playgroups. While it was anticipated by the CfC organisers that local community people would become involved and active in ensuring the activities became sustainable through sourcing local funding when the government funds concluded, the overall

design of the strategy allowed for little deviation. That is, if local people thought a community garden would be more to their liking than a playgroup, this was not likely to be supported financially within CfC.

As can be seen from the table below (adapted from Muirhead, 2002), a programmatic approach serves an overall agenda designed by government, albeit with the best possible motives of achieving positive outcomes. In the CfC example, the aim was to assist in creating communities which would contribute to overcoming some of the negative social indicators known to affect children’s life chances. This in itself recognises the importance of community and social connections in a child’s life. The CfC had many successes and was and still is recognised for significant improvements in certain families’ and children’s circumstances (Muir et al., 2010). The overall control, however, of the programme remains firmly in the hands of government and does not extend into what is known in community development circles as a ‘developmental’ approach.

A developmental approach starts from the ideas, wishes, and experiences of local people who identify what they want to do and, although they might seek assistance in implementation, the activities remain theirs. Community people and agency representatives may work together to achieve the goals set but as equal partners in cooperative relationships.

Table 1: Programme and developmental approaches

Programme Approach	Developmental Approach
Focus on the programme	Focus on the citizens, children, and adults
Agenda set by programme designers, driven centrally	Agenda set by citizens, children, and adults and driven by them
Aim: programme objectives (for example, better parenting, improved health, and so on)	Aim: self-reliance and self-sustainability
Starts where programme designers think the people should be	Starts from where the children and adults are at
Grand overall plan	Small steps, by step
Time: determined by the programme funding, usually time and resource limited	Time: long term and ongoing
Agency workers coordinate activities	Genuine cooperative partnerships with agency workers
Outcome oriented	Process oriented
Targeted, selective involvement	Public, expansive involvement

Adapted from Young et al. (2012)

Contained in these characteristics are elements for practice. In order to be able to work alongside the people in these communities workers need: to be able to understand how the communities work; to listen carefully to what is being told them without judgement but with openness; to see the possibilities that exist in the hopes people have for themselves and their children, even though there may be considerable challenges; to demonstrate that they can be trusted to do what they say they will and to treat people respectfully and with dignity; to honour cultural traditions without falling victim to erroneous cultural claims, such as ‘violence is accepted in our culture’; to form working and workable relationships with people in the community who have strengths and skills to contribute and to support them as they do so; and there are many others

(Young, 2013). Other abilities that workers need are to be a resource to the people, to know how to access resources, to provide skills development training (for example, in conflict resolution or group meeting management), and so on. All of these attributes are part of the social worker's stock in trade and while they are named here as relevant to community or developmental practice, they are also relevant to individual work with families and children. The common skill and attribute set between workers working with individuals and with groups or communities reinforces the authors' belief and those expressed by Young et al. (2012) that this work is 'just good social work' and that what could be encouraged is fewer new skills but different application. The difference is in the context and it is here that workers may need additional exposure or education.

A well-known saying associated with community development is 'act local, think global', embodying the connection between the two very different contexts in which CD operates. Contexts here refer to the local, as in place and its people, and also may refer to communities of interest which range over geography. They also refer to considerations of the broader setting, to actions and decisions made elsewhere which affect people in local places. While the work to be done is with people, mainly as face-to-face, or the interpersonal, the activities engaged in are affected by and hopefully will also influence those decision-makers far away. Context, then includes both the local and the 'global', and all the intricacies of political, environmental, social, economic, cultural, and often spiritual life. The difference in context, then, between working individually with a family or person, and a community or group, lies in what aspects of the context are most relevant and pertinent to that setting and/or issue. Social workers need good understandings of these aspects in whatever work they are doing, but for community development with child protection we maintain that, for many social workers, there is a need to revise what constitutes the context for the work.

Developmental approaches have at their core the notion of public work. That is, it is expected that the agreements about what to do, who with and how are readily inclusive of any of the potential participants. There is the underpinning of trusting relationships which accept that the information about activities is publicly known and discussed. An illustrative and comparative perspective is to consider work conducted in a counselling relationship, which treats the discussions and tasks to be completed as essentially private, between the people as clients and the professional worker, the counsellor. Not only are the other aspects of developmental work of equal and collaborative partnerships important in the work to be done, but the element of publicly available agreements of work to be conducted is foundational and in direct contrast to the private nature of counselling work. While counselling models may include client-directed work, equally they may not, while community practice relies on the direction decided by the people involved. Developmental work incorporates all these components, and distinguishes the nature and process of the work.

An additional complexity should be introduced here. Community development work, as individual or counselling work does, embodies different models for practice. There are some forms of community development which focus on expert-led, planned activities, for example. The Community Organising approaches commonly found in the USA have a lengthy history of such work. Similarly, some counselling models use strengths-informed practices in work with individual clients. The labels 'Programmatic' and 'Developmental' approaches, therefore, must be taken as starting points and not as binaries or absolutes. Some work with community-based activities will be able to be identified as conforming more to a programme approach, just as some work with individuals can be considered to meet developmental principles. We explore this complexity a little more, particularly in relation to child protection work, in the next section.

Programmatic work with child protection

Much child protection work in Western countries, and particularly in Western Australia, is performed under the statutory auspices of government departments. It is therefore located at the tertiary end of the prevention spectrum. It is what Waldegrave (2006, p. 58) has identified as the “traditional child protection model common to the Anglo-American world” and thereby consists of an adversarial, investigatory process which tends to antagonise and alienate parents who are less likely to recover their abilities to parent successfully. This is in contrast to a cooperative, consensual approach which seeks to provide parents with the supports necessary to assist them to change their behaviour and hopefully preserve the family unit. This is ‘back-end’ work focusing on rehabilitation rather than just concentrating on ‘front end’ (Waldegrave, 2006, p. 73) work which focuses predominantly on investigations and gathering sufficient evidence for convictions. It could be argued that the latest policy direction adopted by the state government department responsible for child protection in WA seeks to align ‘back-end’ and ‘front-end’ work more closely, a move which recalls previous policy positions which clearly identified community and its structures as a key partner in child protection. The Signs of Safety (SoS) framework was implemented throughout the Department from 2008 (DCPFS, 2013a) and remains the primary practice approach for the Department, whose title was augmented by the addition of ‘and Family Support’ in 2013. The current Department for Child Protection and Family Support (DCPFS) retains its primary focus “on risk, [and] emphasises putting families in the centre of assessment, planning and responsibility for the safety of their children, and working collaboratively with families even if children have to be removed” (DCPFS, 2013a, p. 1). In this definition, family support appears to be constructed at the tertiary end of prevention in which risk and relevant families have already been identified (DCPFS, 2013b, p. 2).

Staff using both the Signs of Safety (SoS) framework and the policy previously in use, employing the four pillars of capacity building, inclusion, engagement, and collaboration could (and did) justifiably argue for taking a strengths-based approach in their work. There are criticisms of the use of a strengths-based approach in child protection (Saleebey, 1996). SoS’s lack of evaluative properties also attracts criticism (Price-Robertson & Bromfield, 2011, p. 4). Whether SoS can be called a strengths approach is arguable. Some members of the DCPFS Executive prefer to consider SoS as incorporating a risk assessment tool (personal communication). There is no doubt, however, that some practitioners frame SoS as a strengths practice.

Significantly, a programme was implemented prior to the adoption of SoS, and running alongside it, in remote WA which located Remote Community Child Protection Workers (RCCPW) in Aboriginal communities to undertake child protection using community development as the main work strategy. An outcome of concern identified in the Inquiry into Violence in Aboriginal Communities (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002) was to work with communities to assist them in addressing child protection matters.

Taking a family support or family service approach to child protection provides the opportunity for a community approach using programmatic strategies. In this approach, a family has already been identified as one of risk, and tertiary or secondary prevention (Tomison & Poole, 2000) is required. It is here that the SoS used by the DCPFS in WA could qualify as a programmatic approach. For example, given the SoS model below, the family is recognised as important in developing working relationships, which is one of the three principles outlined by the SoS framework (DCPFS, 2011). The emphasis here is on “constructive working relationships between professionals and family members, and between professionals themselves” (DCPFS, 2011, p. 4). In community work, relationships are key features in change work yet there is a distinction to be made between relationships established in community work and those under statutory arrangements. Statutory work requires workers, under this model, to assess risk first and strengths later. It is a model that still situates the problem in a deficits framework rather than one that is strengths based – building on what is already working in the family. Decision-making is most often left in the domain of the professionals rather than the family. This is not to suggest a reverse arrangement is preferred. Rather it highlights that constructive relationships within community work stem from the premise that each community member has something to contribute, including the professional with his or her resources and connections to other

organisations. When community members, here conceptualised as the mums, dads and significant others caring for children (valued as experts in their lives), are engaged, alternative intervention strategies may be built. These can address needs identified by both authorities and family members and can move the typical programmatic response into the developmental domain.

Figure 1 Signs of safety, Department for Child Protection and Family Support 2011, p13



(©2008 Andrew Turnell,
aturnell@signsofsafety.net
in DCPFS, 2011, p. 13)

To conceptualise child protection from a community development perspective, where alternative interventions and strategies are arrived at collaboratively, requires child protection workers to rethink practices which have relied largely on expert decision-making. Here the second principle of SoS; “thinking critically, [and] fostering a stance of inquiry” (DCPFS, 2011, p. 5) offers workers some guidance. This principle of the SoS framework highlights the “paternalistic impulse” (DCPFS, 2011, p. 5) and challenges workers to refrain from deciding to intervene based on their ‘truth’ and enjoins them to seek a fuller understanding of the complexities alongside family members. When people see that their input matters and professionals are seen as enablers rather than experts, relationships and outcomes may be sustained (Frank & Smith, 2006). In community development work, expertise is believed to be held with community members who themselves contribute valuable skills, knowledge, and practices to issues that impact upon them. The following example illustrates how, within a programmatic approach, there is capacity for developmental processes that achieve constructive working relationships, critical thinking and sustainable change, while enacting the four pillars of engagement, capacity building, inclusion and collaboration which were central to, and in keeping with, the previous DCD’s approach.

The CfC is a programmatic response which also has developmental possibilities. Although not having statutory responsibilities, it was designed as a preventive mechanism, by investing early in children’s lives to avoid long-term support costs and from children (potentially) living a life of crime. An example illustrating how a standard policy-driven programme was changed to include developmental aspects was that of the Aboriginal Community Researchers. This group comprised members of the local Aboriginal community and was established to work alongside the CfC worker to devise a research instrument that would capture the child-care needs of Aboriginal people in the area. The Community Researchers, with their knowledge of family, kinship groupings, language and place, implemented a door-to-door survey with a highly successful response rate. From this information the Community Researchers and the CfC worker prepared a submission for the development of an Aboriginal child-care centre in the region. The Community Researchers went on, beyond CfC, to advocate on many other issues facing their community.

The original CfC strategy was to implement child-care for Aboriginal families; the programme which developed included several activities that the local Aboriginal people wanted and which enabled them to

support and protect their children in culturally relevant ways. Targeting low socio-economic communities, as the CfC did, often highlights the shortfalls of such groups rather than their capacities. In this example, the strengths, wisdom, cultural capital, and skills of people themselves were realised. Through processes of engagement the CfC worker invited people to decide how best to use the resources available to them, within the constraints of CfC's vision and aims. When led by community members, projects are more likely to be effective with a higher take-up rate and greater participation than when projects are imposed from outside a community (Blitz, Kida, Gresham, & Bronstein, 2013). The process of re-shaping activities to include community members as equal partners, through listening to and acting on their views, can be very powerful.

Another example illustrates how developmental processes are possible given a programmatic response to child protection. In another CfC site, parenting programmes targeted parents deemed in need of up-skilling and who were mostly known to the DCPFS; these parents are often framed as 'bad' parents in need of 'fixing' (Hendrick, 2011). Schools were approached by CfC to identify parents who would benefit from the programme. Known for its focus on community organising principles of working in collaboration and recognising that families 'love and are concerned for their children', the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme (McDonald, Billingham, Conrad, & Morgan, 1997) brought its resources (funding, school staff, and personnel from community organisations) together with those strengths and capacities identified in parents and caregivers. Over an eight-week programme aimed at building lasting relationships between children and parents (as well as between families and the community more broadly), parents, staff, and community members progressed through collaboratively agreed-upon activities that led to developed relationships and links with services in the community. Previous FAST participants (parents) led some activities and shared their experiences. In this way learning was reciprocal and multifaceted coming from school staff, community organisational workers, parents, and other caregivers in the community. Lifelong friends and supports are often the result. In the CfC site, the principal of one school involved noted the success of the programme with his telling of one father who was not involved in the school before engaging in FAST. Following his involvement he went on to lead other parents through the programme and actively take on other unrelated projects within the school. Both these examples illustrate the potential of programmatic approaches being able to use developmental principles, which in turn strengthens the contribution in primary protection strategies to child safety.

Developmental work with child protection

As noted above, 'back end' work involves rehabilitative work with families identified at risk, and as such is more likely to involve programmatic responses. There is a focus on developing human capital through the provision of a range of family services. While potentially taking a strengths approach (that is one which is inclusive, collaborative and emphasises equal partnerships), this does not necessarily meet the requirements of a developmental community approach, but remains on an individual level. That is, the element of public work is not present. This is not a drawback. Indeed, much good child protection work may be conducted from this perspective, as recommended by Waldegrave (2006) and many others (for example: Bell, 2004; Jack & Gill, 2010; Tomison & Wise, 1999).

The term 'developmental child protection' was adopted by Senior Community Child Protection Workers (SCCPW)¹ for the (then) Department for Child Protection (Young, 2013) in conceptualising their work as moving between working publicly with community members and privately with family members to protect children. Developmental work involves working *alongside* and *together*, not *for* or *on* as is often the case with much child protection work and reinforces the principles of equal partnerships in a collaborative relationship. It is these aspects of developmental work which present some challenges, particularly in systems which have traditions of constructing the work as adversarial and investigatory. How much is it possible to provide an equal platform for decision making, for example, when there exists the suspicion and, at least preliminary, evidence of risk to a child's safety? These were considerations for the SCCPW in

performing their roles which had been described to them on starting employment as having 'community development' as well as 'child protection' functions. Because there was little in the way of specific training or models for practice in these newly created roles and workers were selected for their community experience, they tended to enquire as to how to fit child protection into community approaches rather than the other way round. Some creative and imaginative work resulted.

The following example describes, and is illustrative of, the focus – keeping children safe – while enabling the identification of other needs – provision of services – through a joint and collaborative process – starting with mother, then father, then family and community members to identify and work towards solutions. The first example reports on a domestic violence incident witnessed by young children resulting from alcohol being brought into the community.

Firstly the SCCPW sat with the mother to discuss a safety plan which included the mother removing her partner out of the house while he is drinking and under the influence. She also needed to have some way to communicate with police if she was feeling unsafe and to arrange a plan for the family to leave the community when the roads opened up.

The SCCPW had also spoken to the father with the police over the course of the day for him to be part of the safety plan. Between the police and SCCPW we were able to touch base with all family members in a manner that was not intrusive but also allowed us to monitor the family and maintain the children's safety.

This incident highlighted key issues for the community when responding to Domestic Violence. There is no safe house or place for community to go in this situation, nor are there adequate communications, such as phones. This has started broader discussion within the community and with agencies as a safe place is needed for community members as well as communication facilities. The community identified the community centre as a potential safe place and the DCP provided walkie talkies for communication.

Another example which demonstrates the importance of keeping a child safe through helping relationships to stay intact is given below.

The conflict between a teenage mother and her mother affected how the child could be cared for resulting in the baby being at risk. An innovative caring solution was implemented whereby a 'night' carer would take care of feeding and looking after the baby at night and the mother and grandmother during the day. Family members were instrumental in this arrangement to ensure keeping the mother and grandmother involved. Tensions between the mother and grandmother reduced and the child had additional carers, thereby strengthening the safety and stability of the environment. (Young, 2013)

These examples move beyond the 'best interests' argument of child rights (which rely solely on removing children from harm), to incorporating other rights requirements, such as state resources, family care, and parental participation in decision making. They also illustrate some of the key elements identified by Young et al. (2014). This will be discussed next.

Examining the key elements

We have found the framework (Young et al., 2014) describing child protection practice using Child Rights and Community Development principles and practices to be a useful starting point to examine how child protection may be conceptualised and translated into practice from this perspective. These elements have been drawn from practice and theorising across three countries, Aotearoa New Zealand, Norway and Western Australia² and they are named (inter alia) as: *collective action*, *contextual*, *family capital*, *reciprocity*, and *child-centred*. The next stages for developing these elements is for the authors to seek feedback from practitioners to obtain their views about the extent to which the elements above are already used in practice. If they are not used, the authors would like to determine how the elements might better be operationalised in order to facilitate a more complex and nuanced engagement with child protection.

Additionally, we, as educators, are interested to extend the theorising about the described approach to better prepare our students for this complex rights-based work. What is important for our purpose is to be able to examine the nature of child protection work as developmental work in and of the community: that is, how members of the community may contribute to our understanding of the importance of a collective approach to keeping children safe. This is not to deny the importance of individual work, especially that performed from a developmental perspective. But, as discussed above, the default for child protection workers in many Western jurisdictions is often to work only with the family whilst sometimes placing the child with carers, rather than seeing this work in all its albeit messy practicalities as ‘everyone’s business’. It is acknowledged that a family’s right to privacy should not be infringed upon, but the family’s right to supportive and potentially long-term mechanisms involve assisting families to engage in collective reciprocal arrangements. Here we make the case for the collective nature of protection practice joining our voices to those referred to above who also call for more child protection to be conceptualised as a *community practice*.

The element immediately evident from the Young et al. (2014) framework as applied to these current examples is that of *collective action*. In the examples given earlier, the work undertaken involved multiple interested people ranging from other agency personnel to extended family, all of whom contributed to the solution in productive ways. While it might be expected that the different people could have had different ways of going about the work, they all had the ultimate aim of the safety of children. From a risk-averse perspective, statutory workers may have considered removal as the most obvious step in two of the case examples discussed earlier. In the case of the community researchers, it is doubtful if this strategy would have been used by statutory workers, yet, involving Aboriginal elders and through them, community members, enables greater engagement and trust by the very people who would be sought by statutory workers to place children outside their immediate families. Although current practice for placing Aboriginal children in need of alternate to home care with kin is already established, enhancing a wider community engagement in providing supportive structures, as was done with the Young (2013) example, can lead to greater protective measures within the community.

In each of these settings, *context* and the situatedness of the families with their histories, culture, and experiences all played a large part in the circumstances that arose for people in relation to resources. Another critical factor for the success of this approach was the connectedness people had to each other which was garnered by the remote workers to build safety without removal into care. This indeed is a contributor to determining the ‘best interest’ of the child. *Family capital*, that is accepting that families have their own ways of understanding and explaining situations as well as having resources with which to address them, was also present in all these examples. Without family input, outcomes may well have been a return to the default position of child removal. Many strengths-based approaches seek the input of families to both explain what is happening as well as to articulate what could/should be done. It is this aspect that convinces some practitioners that SoS is a strengths-based practice. *Reciprocity*, or shared responsibility and trusting the efforts of other people involved, was also crucial to enabling agency workers in particular, but also different community members to see that each had an important and valued part to play.

The only element of the framework which is not in evidence in these examples is that of child participation. While there is a clear focus on *child-centredness*, it remains the case that for much of the work in child protection, children are the silent objects of others’ decisions and actions. This is the element which causes the most difficulty, yet for child protection work from a community development perspective, children are part of the collective not separate from it. From a rights-based perspective, children have a right to participate, making it even more important that workers find ways to enable children’s wishes to be heard. While the SoS tool of engaging children in drawing and other activities has promise and there may be some degree of preparedness by practitioners to consider developmental approaches in their work, including children as equal participants is likely to be the main barrier to achieving a purely collective approach to the work. The village remains largely that comprising adults, not children.

Conclusion

Child protection is everyone's business and certainly there are indications that child protection workers are seeking to engage in preventive work. In this paper, the type of 'business', advocated is that of collective and participatory engagement by community people, families, and children to work alongside agency authorities. It is in the informal rather than the formal or mandated relationships that children's 'best interests' may be better served. We have presented an argument to extend protective work into preventive work by using an understanding of the multi-faceted interaction of child rights provisions in combination with the principles of community approaches. If we could see policy and practice include these principles, then the 'village' may be the entity best placed to protect children.

Notes

- ¹ Previously known as Remote Community Child Protection Workers (RCCPW)
- ² While WA is not an autonomous country it has State responsibility for Child Protection and so, for the purposes of this work can be considered to be of similar status as the other two countries.

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