BOOK REVIEWS

Disruptive: How I triumphed over years of abuse from those who were supposed to protect me
Angela Bayley with Dr R Eric Swanepoel
Synchrony Books, 2009
ISBN 978-0-95632-580-8, £11.99

The Golly in the Cupboard
Phil Frampton
Tamic Publications, 2004
ISBN 978-0-95476-490-0, £7.99
Reviewed by Ruth Stark, BASW Scotland Manager

THERE IS so little research on the long term outcomes for people who experienced public care in childhood that the memoirs of people who have been in care are very important to understanding how the decisions and recommendations that we make as social workers - and the way that we communicate and work - impact on young people's lives as they grow up through our public care systems.

These books are an invaluable resource both for students and also experienced practitioners to reflect on their own practice of listening to young people. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that we listen to the views of children and young people and take them into account when making decisions in their best interest.

Disruptive is the revisiting of childhood experiences, sometimes very traumatic, of a happy wife, mother and paramedic following a sexual assault by a colleague at a period when she thought she had left behind being the victim of abuse in childhood. Angela revisits her childhood emotionally and intellectually.

Many practitioners in mental health and criminal justice services will have heard tragically similar accounts. But this book allows us to think through our own practice in listening to people, creating that opportunity when people learn to trust us with that awful information that they fear to share with anyone else because it may risk another rejection. It brings home the importance of the social relationship in connecting with people who have been abused so that they can get back the self-esteem to gain control over their own lives and move on.

From the social work perspective, this book is particularly good at highlighting the methods parents, carers and children go to hide what really happens behind closed doors. It covers loss and bereavement revisited at various times in childhood and the importance of just being there for someone who has not yet worked out if you can be trusted or if you can help. From this aspect, the book is really important for practitioners in child protection.

The Golly in the Cupboard describes a childhood with Barnardo's in the 1950s and 1960s. It describes from the heart what in research literature is now called resilience. It starts with the post-war dilemma of many young women faced with the stigma of pregnancy without marriage. It speaks of social engineering and the devastating effect it can have on young lives.

It records the travels of trying to piece together one's roots when there has been a conspiracy of silence and the sadness that when energy is being spent "being resilient" and how little space there is to hear and see the abuse being carried out against less vulnerable young people.

Again, the personal tension that comes through from the writer of knowing who to trust, when to share the emotional roller coaster of connecting with other people, to trust them with one's most innermost thoughts and feelings, comes through and gets you thinking about how in practice you can give opportunities, read the non-verbal communication and just be there to hear the silences.

Whilst Phil Frampton is the more accomplished author, both books are important to those of us working with children and adults who are or have come through the care system. In the absence of research in this area, the reading of these books and others who have taken the courage to tell us of their experiences should be required reading on every social work course.

They should also be read and re-read by experienced practitioners to help think through how we can improve our duty to make Article 12 of the UN Convention a reality. These books help us listen to the reality for people who have to use our services.