

## EDITORIAL

*Peter Limbrick*

You might remember that Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> September last year was switch-on day for the Large Hadron Collider. As I was running a conference in London that day I opened by announcing that the switch-on had gone horribly wrong, there had been a massive explosion and we had all entered a parallel universe. I promised the multi-disciplinary practitioners and parents at the conference that from now on, in this new universe, young children with disabilities and their families would have all the resources they need, disabled teenagers would no longer be bullied in school and that disabled adults would not be discriminated against in employment. I like to have my little joke.

I might joke, or even dream, about sudden and dramatic improvements in provision but at heart I know progress is slow and gradual, sometimes taking two steps forward and one back, sometimes one step forward and two back. One of the main themes in my own work is about services being properly joined up for babies, children and young people who need ongoing multiple interventions. IQJ is itself designed as an aid to multi-disciplinary practitioners in this effort. One thing I have learned though in my work with councils and health trusts is that fully integrated multi-agency systems need just as much energy to maintain them as to build them in the first place.

This is another way of saying that they can be very unstable structures that are vulnerable to the loss of particular enthusiastic practitioners, to middle managers who find new imperatives on their desks and to senior managers who are

persuaded to let money go in other directions. While Victoria Climbié's horrific death provided an impetus to us all to improve how we work together, Baby P's death, equally horrific and in the same London Borough, points towards our failure.

But we must all struggle on, not only because we can see the consequences when we try to address complex situations wearing blinkers, but because families and children tell us how good it feels when we get joined-up working right for them.

I hope you will be inspired by Nicholas Middleton's lead article in this issue about Shropshire's groundbreaking work in early intervention for children at risk. The Council has Beacon status and demonstrates successful multi-agency working for vulnerable children and their families. Shirley Young wants to accelerate the pace towards integrated working and sees the short supply of holistic practitioners as a large part of the problem. In her article *How can we create and grow 'holistic practitioners'?* Shirley describes the need for training and effective management to create and nurture people who can operate in integrated systems.

Sally Blythe in her *Opinion* piece observes that modern child care, early years practices and taxation policies encourage us to hand over our infants to secondary care-givers. She describes some consequences of this sad situation for child development. John Wright (*Bercow, plus six...*) expected more from the Bercow Review and has suggested six additional

recommendations of his own to close the loopholes that allow Local Authorities to evade their duties to some children who have special needs.

Penny Lacey and Ross Stoker in their articles describe very successful work at grass-roots level; Penny with staff in a special school and Ross with parents of children who have disabilities. Both articles show that effective support is always based in relationship. Sue Boucher, in *The International Children's Palliative Care Network*, brings an international perspective to sharing good practice and campaigning for better services.

In Episode 4 of *A Town Like Alice* Deborah Berkeley reminds those of us who work in early childhood intervention that there are very significant consequences for families when a child arrives in the family with disabilities and special needs, and that the mother, usually the main carer, can feel her own life has to be put on hold indefinitely.

Our journey towards effective and integrated, family-centred services and towards better lives for people with disabilities and special needs has a very long way to go still. We do not yet know if Children's Trusts are a viable idea. We have not found the key to unlock the secrets about keyworking and to remove the profound obstacles to it. We have confirmed that improvement costs money – a very worrying thought as our economy plunges downward.

We do not have a Large Hadron Collider incident to put thing right for us and there are no laurels yet for us to rest on. Campaigners must carry on campaigning, disabled people must carry on fighting for their rights, practitioners and managers must carry on exploring integrated solutions and parents must carry on battling for effective services for their children. So much struggling, so much lost opportunity, so much wasted energy. I had expected we would be in a better position as the decade draws to its close but I hope readers will find some encouragement in this issue of IQJ to spur them on.