

## BOOK REVIEWS

### "Community Care - a Reader"

**Bornat J, et al**

Macmillan and the Open University, 1993

Review : by Mark Jones

This book forms part of the open University course Community Care, a core course for their Diploma in Health and Social Welfare.

The book is divided into four main sections :

- community
- care
- policy
- practice

As is the case with all readers of this type, the text seeks to provide an overview of the issues discussed, encompassing all the relevant issues, then pointing the reader in the direction of more in-depth material. Community Care carries this off well and is both an informative and interesting read.

#### Community

This section outlines the basic concept of community, whilst at the same time knocking down some of the Aunt Sally's such as the romanticised notion of community spirit of yesteryear. The use of key texts by composing both a theoretical description of community and true life representations taken from interviews with real people actually living in the types of community described, serves to demonstrate with real impact the often disparate notions exchanged between theorists and their remoteness from the life experiences of many individuals and their families.

This model of juxtaposition of theory and real life, is one which permeates the whole text and really brings home to the reader how essential it really is to actually look at what is going on in the world with their own eyes, and through the eyes of those living in it, and that the experience of doing so will be far more beneficial than that gained from the application of some abstract theory.

The latter part of this section describes the extent to which the community acts to care for itself, either through choice, or the simple fact that no other source of care is available. Jenny Finch's description of A Women's health group in Mansfield typically builds upon the previous overview discussion of women and community, to give an example of how women worked together to ensure their specific needs were both understood and provided for.

Here also is the story of Lil - a description of the deteriorating mental health of an 80 year old woman - is used to illustrate the burden often felt by neighbours. The book is almost worth buying to read this moving and annoying condemnation of health and social care provision. It begs the question as to how policy planners faced with dozens of "Lils" up and down the land can possibly make any decision to reduce the level of care available.

## Care

As with the previous section, Care uses a series of extracts to discuss the theory, and also provide real examples of that theory in practice. The section is divided into context which shows the variety of historical, cultural, and social sites and relations of care, using examples drawn from domestic service, institutional care, mothering, neighbouring, and caring for a gay partner.

Struggles of care, describes the problems faced by both carer and cared for, highlighting the often all too overwhelming pressure on the carer who receives little or no support as they are not actually ill or dependent themselves.

This leads us into dilemmas of care, which probes the painful process whereby a caring relative has to make decisions about the future care of those close to them, in this case a mentally handicapped son, and the dilemmas faced by paid carers who find themselves caught in an institutional situation which has developed a system over time which caters for the needs of staff rather than those who are there to be cared for. The rights of carers and cared for are also ably addressed, particularly through the example of sexuality in the disabled. Again, this section brings home the true reality of care, and presents situations which will be familiar to many readers, either from direct personal experience of caring, or from the work environment.

## Policy

In this section, the real life accounts of real people, are put on hold, whilst we are given a thorough tour of the various issues surrounding community care policy. We are still referred to though, a whole series of relevant extracts from key texts, governmental reports, and the views of representative organisations such as MIND.

This section kicks off with a retrospective approach, taking us back to the roots of care policy in the early nineteenth century, then brings us up to speed with a series of articles drawing attention to current debates. It is a little depressing at times to realise that some of the attributes of the policy discussed from over a century ago appear vaguely similar to some of the situations faced today.

Three main areas of policy formulation are examined; in the context of caring for the elderly, the mentally ill, and for those with learning difficulties. This section provides the reader with a good overview of recent policy debates, and points to key questions about cost containment and citizenship. The all too real view that policy is often designed to suit the professionals rather than the client is re-iterated with some force, particularly as the inadequacies of professionally delivered services are highlighted as they continue to be bailed out by non-statutory support networks.

## Practice

The last section of the book is exactly what it says it is - practice applications of all that has gone before. Some of the more difficult concepts for anyone trying to operate in a caring society are discussed - such as the New Right thinking that a market economic model can be applied to any organisational system - including that of community care provision.

The last contribution in this section, and indeed in the book, Ann Macfarlane's the Right to Make Choices gives a probably rare glimpse at a situation where two disabled women

were able to present a case to their social services department detailing the assistance they required in their lives, and the subsequent tailored service they received. Even though this necessitated some five months work for the women concerned, there is at last sense of victory here and we are offered an insight into what the system really should be like.

One cannot help being pessimistic having read the book though, as even after the hope of some of the examples given, and the achievements of Ann Macfarlane's disabled women, there is a pervasive feeling that the whole philosophy of community care as espoused by today's government and its agents is fatally flawed, and that nothing but a radical policy shift will meet the needs of those in our society who need and deserve the care and assistance which is too often absent. Maybe this is the challenge to the social policy student who has just finished the book!

Community Care - A Reader is a book which I would have no hesitation whatsoever to recommend. For the student of social policy it provides a ready source of key readings and fully articulates the various debates in community care today. For the seasoned policy professional it carries some messages which will no doubt be unpalatable, but the images of real life under the policy they are creating cannot be ignored. Community Care is also just a very good read. Even though the reader format demands it, the book successfully identifies a whole range of policy expositions and puts them neatly alongside practical demonstrations of community care policy in action. Well worth the money!

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## **Health and Wellbeing : a reader 1993**

**Edited by Beattie A, Gott M, Jones L and Sidell M**  
The Open University/ Macmillan Press

*Reviewed by Jane Malloy*

This comprehensive and wide-ranging book forms part of the Open University (OU) course "Health and Well-being" (K258). It is designed specifically to complement other course material provided for students pursuing the Diploma in Health and Social Welfare course.

However, having said that, it would be a mistake to assume that the content of the book is limited to the needs of OU students. On the contrary, the material included is all-embracing and explores the ever increasing debate about health and brings into sharper focus the conflicts inherent in the wider area of social planning and policy making. It is therefore, a book which should be of great interest to those for whom the promotion of health and well-being forms an important part of their everyday working lives.

The volume contains thirty four chapters in the space of 315 pages. Consequently no one chapter is lengthy and each is written by a different contributor(s). Each chapter is a version of previously published work, the majority of which are journal articles or extracts from books.

The range of material chosen for inclusion in the book is impressive and the ideas put forward continually challenge the reader to question certain aspects of the society in which we live. For example, the chapter concerned with the health needs of homeless people draws our attention to the fact that some health authorities deny the existence of homelessness in their areas in spite of clear and irrefutable evidence to the contrary. Another example is the chapter which considers the "social construction of child rearing" which clearly pinpoints the confusion and concern amongst care-givers engendered by the largely contradictory research into the history of child-rearing carried out over the last 150 years or so.

Considering the very wide range of articles included, the editors are to be congratulated on the way in which the material has been organised. The book is logically divided into three sections.

There are thirteen chapters in Part I all of which in some way contest the "normal" concept of health. Included are articles which give some prominence to the importance of lay experiences and beliefs about health while others assess the merits of alternative and complementary practices. The contribution of the community health movement in working for health and wellbeing is discussed and so is the debate surrounding the "New Public Health".

Part II consists of nine chapters in which the contributors debate issues which need to be addressed in everyday health. The importance of the social culture is emphasised and some uncomfortable ideas come under scrutiny. For example, research into the role of health visitors in "policing" the family is examined as are certain erroneous assumptions of health professionals in relation to the perceived needs of disabled women.

The concluding twelve chapters in Part III emphasise the wider dimensions of society which have the potential to affect health. A range of views concerning future directions for promoting health are put forward and the question of personal responsibility for health and ill-health is discussed. Global and environmental issues are included in this section and there is an interesting debate concerning the benefits and disadvantages of the private car in promoting health and well-being.

The book has clear contents and index pages and helps the reader to select areas of particular interest, while the references which appear at the end of each chapter make for ease of retrieval. There is a list of figures and tables and where the latter appear in the text, they are well referenced and logically sequenced. The breadth of the book is remarkable and this is reinforced by the large number of contributors. Although many of their names are familiar and known for work in the health care field, it seems a shame that, with the exception of the editors, there is no indication of their background or current job.

Overall this is an excellent publication in which the content is well organised, the style extremely readable and there is a refreshing emphasis on the positive dimensions of health and well-being. However, it would not be viewed as the "definitive book on health and well-being" but should be seen as complementary to other more in-depth study of the issues raised.

Acquisition of the book is strongly recommended to all those with an interest in health care matters and the concept of "a reader" is especially useful for part-time students for whom locating and retrieving material may be both difficult and time-consuming. The material included in the reader should prove invaluable to teachers who are required to educate about health and health care matters and provide a much needed resource to which students can be referred. Clearly, this a welcome addition to all college libraries. Politicians, too, could learn a great deal from this book!

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