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# Editorial – Looking north

*Mike O'Brien, guest editor*

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This edition represents a new departure for the *Review* in that it is a collection of articles written by colleagues at Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden. The articles are an outcome from my time there in 2009 when I was fortunate enough to be the holder of the Astrid Lindgren (remember Pippi Longstockings?) Fellowship for research on children. While much of my work was focused around issues of child poverty and children's rights, my location in the social work programme meant that I was able to spend time with many of that programme's staff, as well as teach on the programme. During the course of that work we talked about the possibility of a collection of articles on various dimensions of social work practice and social service provision in Sweden. And so the edition was born as an attempt to provide an insight into social work and social services elsewhere, because of its intrinsic interest, because so often looking elsewhere provides a powerful lens into our own backyard and because we can learn a great deal from the Swedish experiences and structures on so many fronts.

Aside from the direct interest, the articles also create another significant interest through the combination of academic and practitioner involvement and contribution. With the exception of Kerstin Gynnerstedt's introduction, all the other articles draw on research and practice through the joint work of academics and practitioners working in the particular field. This close sense of partnership is a strong characteristic of Swedish research and practice, one which we have often struggled with emulating in the New Zealand context. The grounded nature of the work and the contribution of the academics to the understanding and analysis of the practice provide a considerable richness.

The articles begin with an interesting and useful overview of Swedish social services. It is but a brief snapshot of the history and structure but it does give a very useful background and frame for the work that follows. The sweep across Swedish social security/social insurance, health and social services (broadly defined) provides a very useful starting point and we have complemented that for the benefit of Swedish readers with an introduction to dimensions of a comparable New Zealand frame. While there is no article on children's services (an unfortunate omission which we were unable to overcome), the remaining articles provide a series of interesting insights into issues around informal services for older people, housing for people with mental illness, care of older people with disabilities, the needs and experiences of families who have a child or young person with a disability, and personal assistance and disability rights.

Through all of this, there is a strong focus on services and provisions for people with a disability, using that term widely. Many of the issues which are raised will resonate with the experiences of those who work in this and related fields in New Zealand while other dimensions will be rather different. One of the areas, among many others, that stands out is the active role of the state (local and central) in services and programmes for disabled people, while the issues of the role of families and professionals have a very familiar ring. Alongside these considerations, there are interesting and significant questions about the rights of people with a disability, both the formal creation of those rights and, arguably even more importantly,

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the expression and articulation of those rights. Is there a gap between the rhetoric and the practice that is experienced by disabled people, their families and their carers? Here there are questions which can equally validly be asked in a New Zealand setting.

We hope that you will find the articles interesting, informative and thought provoking. We hope too that you will find them challenging your assumptions, asking new questions and revisiting old ones and we hope that they will provide a stimulus to discussion in your agency and encourage you to explore the questions more extensively. Our grateful thanks to our colleagues in Sweden for the material and for the opportunities and reflections which it creates.

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