

In recent weeks *The Australian* has drawn attention to the inappropriate behaviour of social workers towards children, leading at times to non-accidental child deaths.

Now we have confirmation that child protection is in crisis and we may have to return to putting children in group homes.

Recent national research showed that 73% of foster carers thought that the worst aspect of fostering was dealing with the department's workers, many of whom lack the knowledge needed to make sound decisions relating to traumatised children. Carers said they would have to be treated with more respect and given better support by government agencies before they would extend their period of service.

Wondering what social workers are taught to prepare them for their challenging work with children, I just spent several hours searching the Net for the content of Australian university social work courses. There lies the root of the problem! The words child, child abuse and child development are conspicuous only by their absence in course outlines.

How can you expect social workers to make wise decisions for the care and safety of children when their professional education focusses on social policy, social justice, communities, social engineering, social work theory and all from an adult perspective with nothing about their most important clients: children.

Fifty years ago the UK had specialist children's social workers trained on a 2-year specialist program. I'm advised that Britain has realised its mistake in abandoning specialisation and now expects children's workers to undergo an additional year of study focussing on childhood. Right now, Australian universities appear to be failing social work students and children are likely to be the sufferers.