Editorial Foreword

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This edition of IJASS is a general edition, but with a clear practice focus, covering social work practice, recovery in mental health services and the benefits of volunteering for young people. We hope that these stimulating papers will appeal to readers across the social sciences. Thank you to each of our external paper reviewers for your invaluable and much appreciated contribution to this edition.

In the first paper, Stan Houston and Gerry Marshall in “Developing Anti-Oppressive Practice with the Person-in-Society: Reflexivity and Social Work”, present a reflexive model that can be applied by social workers to enhance their understanding and implementation of anti-oppressive practice. Their conceptualisation centres on five domains of understanding: ‘psycho-biography’, ‘relationship’, ‘culture’, ‘organisations’ and ‘political-economy’. The relevance of this model for social work practice in Ireland is considered charting how oppression is manifested within each of the five domains. The article concludes with a consideration of how social workers can practically apply the model within their day-to-day work practice.

Susan Flynn and Leigh-Ann Sweeney in their paper “Placing Irish Social Work in a Globalised Context: Assembling International Comparisons Through the Literature” argue that variance in international socioeconomic well-being must be better understood by social work students and practitioners in Ireland, as a response to intensifying globalisation. In developing their argument, they pursue two lines of inquiry. Firstly, focused commentary on the literature on socioeconomic wellbeing and globalisation is presented. This operates around four emergent themes: ‘poverty and economic inequality’, ‘life expectancy and health’, ‘quality of life and personal safety’, and ‘conflict and political strife’. Secondly, a composite conceptual framework on the social construction of social work is put forward, and applied, to inform discussion and analysis. They assert that global cognisance for social workers in Ireland is increasingly relevant and compelled by processes of globalisation.

“Exploring the Concept of Recovery in Irish Mental Health Services: A Case Study of Perspectives within an Inter-Professional Team”, is the focus of Calvin Swords and Stan Houston’s paper. The researchers seek to analyse whether the disciplines of medicine, psychology, nursing and social work could work together purposively to promote the biopsychosocial approach to recovery-oriented practice. Interviews revealed that the notion of recovery was shared broadly, but also embraced diverse inflexions across the various disciplinary leanings. This plurality of meaning encourages positive examples of working together and promotes a holistic understanding of the service user’s needs, with no specific discipline colonising the professional or therapeutic agenda. Their findings generate insights
In “Benefits of Volunteering in Young People at Risk of Social Exclusion”, María Celeste Dávila de León, Mercedes Negueruela and Macarena Sánchez-Izquierdo explore the different profiles of young people at risk of social exclusion in Spain who choose to engage in voluntary activities and those who do not, and the benefits for young people of taking part in a volunteering programme over the course of an academic year. Questionnaire results demonstrate after completing their volunteer experience, young people had a positive image of volunteering. They also displayed a willingness to volunteer in the future and saw themselves as more likely to find a job.

In this edition of IJASS, we have changed our usual format of papers and book reviews to also include a poetic creativity space. Going forward, we will endeavour to include a poetic and/or literary creativity space in our editions. We hope that this approach will facilitate both academic and creative expression on fluid social issues, peoples’ lived realities, as well as professional practice opportunities and challenges. The current issue of IJASS features the poems ‘Tamara’ and ‘Behind Closed Doors’, from Fuschia, the first collection of poetry published by Anna O’Doherty in 2019. ‘Tamara’ recounts a child’s view of living in direct provision in Ireland, while the theme of ‘Behind Closed Doors’ is domestic abuse. In the words of Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989), an American poet, novelist and literary critic, ‘In the end, the poem is not a thing we see; it is, rather, a light by which we may see, and what we see is life.’

Lastly, this edition of IJASS includes a review of Struggles for Empowerment, Higher Education Stories from East and West by Ambreen Shahriar and Teresa Bruen (published by UCL Institute of Education Press in 2019). This book explores the real stories of struggle and resilience of students from two rural provinces, the region of Sindh in Pakistan and Connaught in the west of Ireland, as they access and engage in higher education.

As in our previous editions, we have attempted to provide a selection of some of the emerging, and topical writing from the applied social sciences. We hope that you find it an insightful and thought-provoking collection.