Harnessing Information
and Communication Technology
for Vulnerable Children

The redevelopment of the Australian
case management systems ‘Looking After Children’
and
‘Supporting Children and Responding to Families’

S. Tregeagle

Thesis submitted to the University of Western Sydney
In fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy 2009

© Susan Tregeagle 2009
To Joan (1932–2005) and Jim (1910–2005)
The service users who participated in the thesis study often discussed periods of their lives that were painful to recall. Their courage and their frequently expressed concern to make the child welfare system better for other children is much appreciated. Thanks to AbSec, SNAICC and CREATE and my co-researcher for their involvement.

This thesis would not have been possible without the commitment to research of the Board of Directors of Barnardos Australia and Chief Executive, Louise Voigt. I acknowledge their dedication to improving outcomes for vulnerable children. I would like to thank Senior Staff, Program Managers and workers of Barnardos Australia and other agencies who helped me to find participants for my study and generously allowed me time to work on the research. I would particularly like to acknowledge staff of the LAC Project for their assistance. The managers, Jude Morwitzer and Deirdre Cheers, have worked hard to pursue the vision of better services for children and young people.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Associate Professor Michael Darcy, Professor Jan Mason and Dr Lesley Treleaven (in the first year of my candidature), for their guidance over the course of this thesis. Their involvement in preparing journal articles is particularly appreciated. I would also like to thank the reviewers and editors of articles, conference papers and book chapters submitted for publication. I appreciated the assistance provided by University of Umeå, Sweden, for reimbursing participants in the study.

Thank to Jenny Burgess, Dale Brennan, Bill Hoyles, Kelly Richards and Denise Thompson for their assistance with producing the ‘document’.

I would like to acknowledge my husband, Paul, for the practical assistance, encouragement and dedication to the thesis’ completion. His love of learning and commitment to the work in getting the job done has been an inspiration - a work of true supererogation. Thanks to the cheerleaders, my children and friends - especially Fiona and James for Friday night debriefings.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I thereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

..........................................................
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong> <strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 A ‘new’ approach to child welfare practice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Key questions in redevelopment of case management systems</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The organisation of this thesis</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong> <strong>Background: The origins of and academic response to case management systems</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The United Kingdom origins of Australian case management systems</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Division among social work academics</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Conclusion</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong> <strong>A theoretical framework to study ‘Looking After Children’ and ‘Supporting Children And Responding to Families’</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 A social constructionist approach</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Defining knowledge about child welfare interventions</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Case management as technologisation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Understanding service users’ experiences</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Understanding technology in child welfare practice</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Applying findings to redevelop LAC and SCARF</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Conclusion: A theoretical framework for this study</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong> <strong>Methodology and methods of this study</strong></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Overview</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Text oriented discourse analysis</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Text Set One: The academic literature</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Text Set Two: The LAC and SCARF forms</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Text Set Three: Interviews with service users</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5   Findings: The aims of LAC and SCARF-based interventions  
5.1 Social work academic debate: Assistance, worker control and governmentality  
5.2 The LAC and SCARF forms: A ‘balance’ of assistance and control  
5.3 The diversity of service users’ experiences  
5.4 Discussion: Acknowledging the complex goals of child welfare interventions  
5.5 Conclusion  

Chapter 6   Findings: The processes of LAC and SCARF-based interventions  
6.1 Social work academic debate: Professionalism and managerialism  
6.2 The LAC and SCARF forms: A ‘new’ approach to planning  
6.3 Service users and the possibility of relationship  
6.4 Discussion: Planning, written text and relationship  
6.5 Conclusion  

Chapter 7   Findings: Power relations in LAC and SCARF-based interventions  
7.1 Social work academic debate: Participation and resistance  
7.2 The LAC and SCARF forms: Manipulating opportunities to exercise power  
7.3 Service users’ complex experiences of power relations  
7.4 Discussion: A new concept of power for child welfare practice  
7.5 Conclusion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 8</th>
<th>Findings: Information and Communication Technology in child welfare practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>ICT in conjunction with case management: Compelling change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Emerging understandings of ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Social workers’ co-option of ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Service users’ diverse experiences and emerging disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Discussion: A challenge to child welfare practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 9</th>
<th>Conclusions on the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Aims, processes and ICT in the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>The process of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 10</th>
<th>Conclusions on the ongoing development of case management in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Significance for vulnerable Australian children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Service users’ critical role in constructing child welfare knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Contested knowledge amongst social workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>ICT in child welfare practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>The challenge of research with child welfare service users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References 276

Glossary 300

Appendices 304

Appendix 1 LAC flow chart 305
Appendix 2 SCARF flow chart 306
Appendix 3 SCARF assessment domains 307
Appendix 4 Publications and presentations related to this thesis 308
Appendix 5 Interview questions 309
Appendix 6 Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children 310
Tables

1. Numbers of Australian Children using LAC and LACES in eastern Australia 39
2. Timeline of the development of LAC, the Assessment Framework and SCARF 40
3. Characteristics of participants 111
4. Ownership of mobile phones among categories of the research participants 230
5. Access to home computers and the internet among categories of the research participants 231
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAR</td>
<td>Looking After Children Assessment and Action Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AbSec</td>
<td>Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Placement Principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Framework</td>
<td>Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFWAA</td>
<td>Child and Family Welfare Agencies of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIR</td>
<td>Essential Information Records of the Looking After Children case management system (see Appendix 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-SCARF</td>
<td>Supporting Children and Responding to Families electronic system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICS</td>
<td>Integrated Children’s System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Instant Messaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Looking After Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACES</td>
<td>Looking after Children Electronic System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCARF</td>
<td>Supporting Children and Responding to Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAICC</td>
<td>Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TODA</td>
<td>Text oriented discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWSHREC</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This thesis focuses on the redevelopment of two child welfare case management systems used in Australia: Looking After Children (LAC) and Supporting Children and Responding to Families (SCARF). LAC and SCARF are attempts to address the poor outcomes that are widely agreed to be experienced by children in ‘out of home care’ or ‘in need’ in their own families. These case management systems are significant attempts to change social work practice. They represent a shift from earlier modes of practice characterised by autonomous professional relationships to more standardised approaches to social work. They rely heavily on written text and open the opportunity to use information and communication technology (ICT) in child welfare services.

A decade after their introduction, the local licensee of these case management systems sought to reassess the use of LAC and SCARF in Australia. This thesis is part of that process. It aims to address three issues: firstly, to investigate the experiences of children, young people and their families of case managed interventions; secondly, to see if recent developments in ICT could contribute to children’s welfare if integrated into case management systems, and if so how; and thirdly, to examine how the answers to these questions could inform the future development of case management systems.

I take a social constructionist approach to LAC and SCARF and the research questions and draw on Michel Foucault’s theories of discourse and power/knowledge. I explore LAC and SCARF as texts that embody discourses of social work, management and childhood, and reflect tendencies towards ‘technologisation’ and ‘democratisation’ (Fairclough, 1992). I use social constructionist theories to explore the increased use of written text and ICT in child welfare. I identify these discourses by using Fairclough’s ‘text oriented discourse analysis’ (TODA) with three sets of texts: the relevant social work literature, the LAC and SCARF forms and transcripts of semi-structured interviews undertaken in a study with service users.

The study undertaken for this thesis augmented the limited international and local research on service users’ experiences of case management systems, and, extended the scope of these studies to consider the neglected impact of technology in social work interventions. I undertook the design, implementation and interpretation of the study by considering the exercise of power in the research setting. The study was unique in that it explored the long-term use of case management systems in which service users were no longer dependent on welfare agencies. The
methods employed aimed, as far as possible, to acknowledge and restrict the opportunity for myself and others to subjugate service users’ voices.

The study findings relate to the aims, planning process, power relations and technology of the case managed intervention. Service users were found to have a wide range of experiences. Many participants valued practical, social and emotional assistance and the development of insight. The findings indicated that trusting and reliable relationships between service users and social workers were possible. Service users, however, challenged the way in which poverty, extended family relations and childhood were understood and wanted more specialised assistance. They identified written text as creating barriers to their participation in interventions. They described the case management systems as failing to constrain their own, or workers’, exercise of power.

Technology was inevitably part of these child welfare interventions. The existing pen and paper-based systems were problematic. ICT was shown to have communication possibilities in child welfare interventions, and its greater use could potentially address the increasing social disadvantage of service users in the wider society. Although growth in the use of ICT appeared inevitable, however, ICT was shown to have limited impact on social work aims and processes and may be problematic in child welfare. In addition, there were significant barriers to the immediate use of ICT, including limited availability, co-option by social workers and managers and poor understanding of ICT’s impact on communication in social work practice.

The findings of this study provide a basis for redevelopment of LAC and SCARF and the construction of social work knowledge. Service users could make an important contribution, and this study has identified areas in which social work knowledge could better reflect their experiences. This is particularly so as social workers are significantly divided over the aims and processes of intervention, and there is only limited debate about the effects on child welfare of societal ‘orders of discourse’ regarding childhood, ‘democratisation’ and ‘technologisation’. Social workers’ interests need to be differentiated from those of service users, particularly in relation to the use of ICT.

Future development of case management systems will be highly contested given the complex and socially significant discourses that they embody. Change will be constrained, but inevitable, and discourses must be monitored for their impact. Methods and opportunities must be found to involve service users in the redevelopment of case management systems. ICT will play an increasing role in social work practice, and will require ongoing assessment. This study provides a possible starting point for policy development focused on service users’ experiences.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Welfare interventions for children vulnerable to abuse and neglect are a vexed area of public policy. Many children and young people who are known to child welfare authorities continue to be abused or neglected or, if they are removed from their parents’ care, have outcomes well below ‘community’ standards. One recent approach to the reform of child welfare interventions has been the development of case management systems that attempt to standardise the social work aims of interventions and the processes by which these aims are achieved.

Two systems of case management currently used in Australia are: ‘Looking After Children’ (LAC), for children and young people in ‘out of home care’ and ‘Supporting Children and Responding to Families’ (SCARF), for those living with their own families. These case management systems constitute a significant departure from the autonomous professional relationship that has characterised social work practice in the area of child welfare. They have increased the role of written text and technologies in interventions. These systems are now to be reviewed in Australia and this study addresses the questions:

- What have been the experiences of Australian children, young people and their families with LAC and SCARF-based interventions?

- Could recent developments in information and communication technology (ICT) contribute to children’s welfare if integrated into case management systems, and if so how?

- How could the answers to these questions inform the future development of case management systems based on LAC and SCARF?
This introductory chapter describes the context of the study and gives an overview of the research focus, aims and questions. I outline the origins of the study, place it in the context of a university–agency partnership and clarify my own involvement. The chapter identifies the importance of service users’ experiences to the future development of case management in child welfare, and describes some of the problems in earlier research, including the need for more rigorous examination of service users’ accounts of their experiences. I identify issues to be addressed in the research questions and provide an overview of the thesis.

1.1 A ‘NEW’ APPROACH TO CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

Case management systems were introduced into Australia by non-government welfare agencies and academics as a response to concern about child welfare practice (Cheers, Kufeldt, Klein & Rideout, 2007; Champion & Bourke, 2006; Wise, 2003b; Clare 1997; Dixon 2001a). In the following section, I will describe the conditions under which local advocates became interested in these systems as a result of the ongoing abuse and neglect of children known to welfare officials. Now, more than a decade since their Australian implementation, this attempt at reform is being reviewed and I describe the drivers for this reform.

1.1.1 Conditions leading to interest in case management systems in Australia

Case management systems were first considered in Australia at a time when many commentators were concerned about the effectiveness and capacity of the service systems to address children’s welfare (Child and Family Welfare Agencies of Australia (CAFWAA), 2002). In 1997, the year that LAC was introduced in eastern Australia, there were 14,078 children in ‘out of home’ care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008 Table 4.3). In 2000, the first year of implementation of SCARF, there were 198,355 notifications (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008 Table 2.3) and 40,416 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Australia (Australian

1 Deirdre Dixon changed her name to Deirdre Cheers in 2002
In addition, there were estimated to be 36,700 young people identified as homeless (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007 p.55). The following descriptions of child welfare systems are drawn from the limited research of the time.

Service system did not appear to protect children. When children and young people who had been abused or neglected remained in their homes, many were re-abused. In the year 1999–2000, the rate of re-abuse in the twelve months following a substantiated report varied from 10.2% to 23.9% in the states and territories (Australian Government, 2002 Table 15A.10 for the year 1999-2000). Some children died as a result of staying in dangerous environments. During the late 1990s in NSW alone, each year approximately 110 children who were known to the local statutory authority died, with a quarter of these deaths attributed directly to abuse or neglect (New South Wales Ombudsman, 2006 p.i).

If children and young people were removed from abusive situations into ‘out of home care’ their lives were often not improved with interventions often poorly planned and unstable (CAFWAA, 2002). For example, in Victoria over a five-year period children and young people experienced an average of 3.4 foster placement changes, and 23% had five or more placements (Victorian Government, 2003 p.59). There was little planning for children in care and their contact with their social worker could be very limited. In a South Australian study, 56% of children in care did not have current case plans (Gilbertson & Barber, 2004). As few as 50% of children were seen by their social workers on a monthly basis and 53% of young people had experienced at least one change of social worker in the preceding twelve months. Only 32% of young people were involved in the development of plans and 49% had a plan that included maintaining contact with their family. Fewer than half had participated in a case review in the preceding twelve months. The situation appeared little different in other States. For example, in New South Wales, young people in long term care had an average of 3.9 social workers, 6.5% having experienced as many as 10 social workers over the time they were in care and a substantial number did not know the name of their social worker (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996). Over this same period, Aboriginal and Torres Strait
children were seven times more likely than their non-indigenous counterparts to live in care, and their placements frequently did not allow them to maintain their cultural identity (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006-7, 2008; CAFWAA, 2007a p.32; Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Partnership, 2007).

The outcomes for these children and young people in ‘out of home’ care were understood to be well below ‘community standards’. Research conducted prior to the introduction of LAC demonstrated that children and young people who had grown up in care had worse educational, mental health and life outcomes than the general community (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996). Research on restoration showed that attempts to move children and young people back to their parents were successful in only one-third of situations (over a five-year period), with 17% having had two or more failed attempts at reunification (Victorian Government, 2003 p.53-55).

Attempts to address these problems had not proved successful. All Australian states and territories had held government inquiries into child protection and ‘out of home care’ provisions in the decade 1995–2004 (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004), but these had not resulted in meaningful change. The Federal Government maintained a limited leadership role in child protection and ‘out of home care’ and until 2008 (when development of a Federal policy was announced), had ignored calls from the non-government sector to take a more active role to improve standards (CAFWAA, 2002, 2007b).

Commentators claimed that these failures were becoming worse because of increased demand and growing difficulty in providing services. The pressure of demand on child welfare programs rose steeply before and during the implementation of LAC and SCARF. The number of children and young people in ‘out of home care’ more than doubled between 1997 and 2007. By 2006-7 there were 28,441 children in care on any one night (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008 Table 4.3). Child protection systems were similarly overwhelmed, with a substantial increase to 58,563 substantiated cases of abuse and neglect by 2006-7, from 40,416 in 2000 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008 Table 2.4). In addition, child welfare agencies were concerned about the viability of programs for children and young people (CAFWAA, 2002).
particular difficulty was the lack of a skilled workforce (Healy, 2004; McDonald, 1999; Meagher & Healy, 2003). Moreover, the knowledge-base of the social workers in Australia was low and the challenges to the welfare sector were becoming more complex (Industry Skills Council, 2008). Anecdotal reports suggested that social worker turnover was high, and an increased use of locum workers was leading to problems of continuity for children and young people. Standards of record keeping in social work were also poor (Cumming et al., 2007).

It was within this context that Australian academics and non-government agencies became interested in the case management systems that were being developed in the United Kingdom (Cheers et al, 2007; Clare, 1997; Wise 2003b).

1.1.2 Child welfare case management: Preliminary definitions

The LAC and SCARF case management systems were identified as a potential source of reform because they attempted to use ‘expert’ knowledge to shape social work interventions and address some of the difficult characteristics of the Australian service system. Originally paper-based, they have been more recently adapted for use with ICT.

The two case management systems described in this study are as follows:

The first, ‘Looking after Children’ (LAC), was developed for children entering and living in ‘out of home care’. It was designed to be used for children and young people in foster or residential care (over half the children in ‘out of home care’, the remainder being in kinship placements). In Australia, LAC is not recommended for kinship care placements (Dixon, 2001b). LAC involves two sets of forms for each child or young person. The first set consists of five forms concerned with the planning of care:

- Essential Information Record (EIR 1) requires the information needed immediately by carers when a placement is made.

---

2 One other standardised decision-making or risk-assessment system is being used in Australia. This structured decision-making tool was developed by the Children’s Research Centre. Currently this is used in child protection in South Australia and Queensland and is being considered in NSW for child protection. Modules that involve assessment of family needs are also available.
• Essential Information Record (EIR 2) requires more comprehensive information on background and legal status of children and young people.

• The Care Plan outlines the objectives of the placement and the strategies for attaining them.

• Placement Plans 1 and 2 require agreements on the care of the child and details of the day-to-day arrangements.

The second set of LAC forms are:

• The age-related Assessment and Action Record (AAR), which identifies the ongoing needs of the child or young person, and how these needs are to be met. It is subdivided into seven developmental domains of a child’s life.

• The Review of Arrangements form, which aims to check the progress of plans.

• Consultation Papers with which to elicit the views of children, young people, carers and those with parental responsibility (there are three different forms for each of these sets of people).

Appendix 1 describes the timing and order of use of these forms. The LAC forms can be viewed at www.lacproject.org/Resources>Sample materials.

The second case management system, ‘Supporting Children and Responding to Families’ (SCARF), is the Australian adaptation of the United Kingdom’s ‘Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families’ (Assessment Framework). This case management system was developed for children who were ‘in need’ of services but who were living in their own homes with their parents. SCARF may be undertaken in two ways:

• through the development of an Action Plan, followed by assessment, or

• through a time-limited assessment and planning process, leading to an Action Plan.
Appendix 2 describes the order of use of SCARF forms. The SCARF forms can be viewed at www.scarf.org.au>tool kits.

SCARF assessment is undertaken through the use of the ‘Child and Family Assessment’ form and more detailed age-related ‘Add-Its’. SCARF uses the LAC domains of child development, as well as two additional areas: ‘Parenting Capacity’ and ‘Family and Community’. Appendix 3 provides the ‘conceptual triangle’ and the domains identified for each area.

In both LAC and SCARF, the forms are designed for use with an individual child or young person (rather than family or sibling group). Forms are maintained by welfare agencies and introduced by social workers at the first contact with the child and his/her family. The worker, parents, carers and young people all fill in the forms and do so within a set time-frame. These completed forms comprise the child’s or young person’s file, which is retained by the agency. Copies are distributed, on a need to know basis, to identified workers from other agencies and the children, young people and parents themselves. The forms and the information they contain are potentially available to agency managers, researchers and government authorities, subject to privacy laws.

These case management systems have been designed to alter the aims of interventions as well as the goals for childhood development. The authors of LAC and the Assessment Framework (the UK precursor to SCARF) have attempted to institute a shared understanding of assessment, and to establish common standards for child development (Ward, 1998). They claimed that the standards and domains were based on evidence. The norms for care and parenting were set at a ‘community standard’ that represented a shift from previous practice, in which interventions aimed simply for basic care for children in out of home care to discourage use of out of home care services (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996).

The authors of the two systems also attempted to prescribe processes for welfare interventions. These included planning that was structured, time-limited, and involved ongoing review and collaboration between welfare agencies. Processes were also introduced to change the power relationship between service users and social workers.
The authors aimed to increase service user participation in the welfare intervention: ‘It is not just because they have a right to be heard … it is also that parents and carers have important knowledge about children’ (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.11). The authors also introduced strategies to reduce professional autonomy.

A further significant change brought about through the case management system was the increased use of written text. Both LAC and SCARF were designed to encourage the standardisation of the intervention based on external ‘expert’ understandings, and to ensure the detailed recording of information. Emphasis on recording meant that data on children, young people, families and interventions was easier to collect than in previous practice and the systems were able to be ‘commodified’ (made available for sale). Further, recording meant that technology would become an important aspect of case management development. LAC and SCARF are described in detail in Chapters 5–7.

1.1.3 Research rationale: The review of LAC and SCARF in Australia

By 2005, many Australian government and non-government organisations (NGOs) had adopted these case management systems. Over 6,000 children and young people were using LAC each year (LAC Project, 2007a), and forty-seven welfare agencies in New South Wales and Queensland were using SCARF. Despite this apparent success, the Australian licensee of the systems, the LAC Project (a partnership of Barnardos Australia and University of New South Wales), began an internal review of LAC and SCARF in Australia. The reasons for this review are explained below, along with an exploration of how this study was conceived.

There were several issues that led to interest in the redevelopment of these case management systems. From the practice perspective, the LAC Project managers wanted to integrate the two case management systems to better meet the needs of children and young people. The separate development of LAC and SCARF had not allowed for streamlined assessment of children and young people, which is especially important if children are repeatedly entering care and being restored to their own families. The systems needed to be modified to make them more useable in kinship care placements:
LAC had not been designed or recommended for kinship care and SCARF could not be used as a substitute, as it had not been designed for children living away from their families.

The case management systems also needed to be assessed in relation to local cultural and service systems - issues that had not been fully considered in the original implementation of the systems. LAC and SCARF particularly needed to be evaluated in relation to their use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

The LAC Project managers also wished to consider the implications of changes that had occurred since the original implementation of the systems. Technology, for example, had undergone significant change since development of the case management systems and was increasingly used with LAC and SCARF. There was also some indication that service users’ participation was being eroded in local adaptations of the systems. In the United Kingdom, the new Integrated Children’s System (ICS) was less focused on participation (Jones, 2006); in Canada, research interests appeared to be dominating LAC’s development (Cheers et al., 2007) and in Victoria, workers were having increasing influence in modifications to LAC (Champion & Burke, 2006). The LAC Project wanted to ensure that any changes to LAC and SCARF in Australia maintained a strong focus on service users and their participation.

Finally, the LAC Project managers wished to understand the controversy around case management within the social work literature. There were extensive controversies in the international social work literature (discussed in Chapter 2). Furthermore, two Australian States (Tasmania and Western Australia) had stopped using LAC, and this raised concern about some social workers’ resistance to case management in practice and academic commentary was identified as potentially important to understanding why that had occurred.

As part of the reassessment of LAC and SCARF in Australia, Barnardos Australia formed an industry partnership with the University of Western Sydney. This study is the
result of that partnership. Within this arrangement, the industry partner defined the research topic that was submitted to the University for academic and ethical approval. The candidate had to apply for admission on a competitive basis. Supervision of the project was entirely undertaken by the University with progress reports to Barnardos Australia. Costs of the project were shared between the University and industry partner. These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Other processes to contribute to redevelopment have also been developed in parallel, such as consultations with social workers using the case management systems. There is also ongoing research on outcomes of interventions using LAC and SCARF (Cheers, 2006; Cheers et al, 2007; Fernandez, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007a, 2007b; Kufeldt, Cheers, Klein & Rideout, 2007). Furthermore, a separate research project arising from this thesis on cultural care planning in LAC has been established.

1.1.4 The researcher’s interest in this study

My own interest in development of LAC and SCARF stems from long-term concern with the Australian child welfare systems, and my frustration with thwarted attempts for reform. Since the 1980s, I have been involved in advocacy to improve outcomes for children. As a social worker, I have been employed by independent advocacy organisations and Barnardos Australia. My work had included establishing an industry group on family welfare to lobby the Australian Federal Government. By the mid-1990s, however, I was increasingly concerned that improvements would not be achieved through advocacy alone, and that individual practice would need to be changed.

As a paid employee and senior manager with Barnardos Australia, I had been involved in the decision to implement LAC and SCARF as an attempt to reform child welfare practice and I wished to evaluate the role of case management in improving the individual care of children and young people. I had observed the impact of these case management systems on the quality of the programs and I was concerned to test my views by exploring the experiences of children, young people and families. Sharing Canadian Kathleen Kufeldt’s view (Kufeldt, Simard, Thomas, & Vachon, 2005), I felt that LAC was a vehicle for potential reform of child welfare systems within a federal
system in which there are few other avenues for service improvement. I believed then, as I believe now, that, even if LAC were not a comprehensive solution, it at least had the potential to make a substantial improvement in children’s welfare.

I understood that the experiences of service users in the integration of LAC and SCARF would be crucial in potentially strengthening these systems and ensuring that they remained child and family-centered. In the United Kingdom, development of the case management systems appeared to have swung away from a focus on service users, towards managerial concerns. When other States had begun to use LAC, the concerns of managers and workers appeared to dominate implementation. In Barnardos’ own programs, workers seemed least compliant with the provisions in LAC and SCARF that require them to get signatures from service users.

Finally, I was concerned to examine technology’s impact on social work practice and its potential to alter child welfare. Within Barnardos Australia, I had observed the acceptance and high expectations of computers and the take-up of electronic versions of case management (known as LACES and E-SCARF). Each professional worker in Barnardos had access to and actively used a computer; data-bases were used routinely at all levels of the agency (from workers to local managers to central management). Yet, no government had taken up the electronic systems for monitoring either individual children’s welfare or system performance. I was aware that welfare programs were also slow to take up new technologies with young people, despite trials of mobile phones to assist homeless young people (Hoyles & Tregeagle, 2007; Tregeagle, 2007). In the United Kingdom, attempts to computerise these systems had been poor and met with considerable resistance (Jones, 2006).

These diverse interests led me to take up the opportunity to apply for candidature. I was grateful for the opportunity to study theory and to spend time on in-depth consideration of the research, which is not normally possible within a busy practice agency.
1.2 KEY QUESTIONS IN REVEDELOPMENT OF CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

This study focuses on three key questions based on the issues identified by Barnardos Australia:

- What have been the experiences of Australian children, young people and their families with LAC and SCARF-based interventions?

- Could recent developments in information and communication technology (ICT) contribute to children’s welfare if integrated into case management systems, and if so how?

- How could the answers to these questions inform the future development of case management systems based on LAC and SCARF?

In the section below I will describe the background to each question.

1.2.1 What have been the experiences of Australian children, young people and their families with LAC and SCARF-based interventions?

My first research question concerns the experiences of service users of interventions that have used LAC and SCARF case management systems. In this section I will explore the central importance of service users to this study. I will examine the variety of claims about their experiences in the highly polarised debate on case management in the social work literature. I will describe the contribution of my study in addressing the limitations of previous research of service users’ experiences.

The use of the term ‘service user’, employed throughout this study, reflects current use of language in the often uneasy debate about what to call children, young people and parents using child welfare services (McDonald, 2006). Over the past twenty years terms have altered to reflect changes in the relationship between family members and welfare agencies. Since social workers have largely stopped using the term ‘patient’ (with
connotations of medical settings) a number of other words have been used. The term ‘client’ is most widely used in Australia. There has been a trend to use of ‘customer’ and more recent challenges concerning the word ‘citizen’ (McDonald, 2006). As McDonald points out these terms can be seen as metaphors for the relationship described and have implications for the construction of the identities of people and for their relationships. Rather than use the terms ‘client’ or ‘customer’, my choice of ‘service user’ reflects current trends in language in United Kingdom and generally in academia. This selection is important as I wish to contribute to international debate in publications and international conferences (see Appendix 4). I also am interested in using a term that does not have the unfortunate associations of previous terms: ‘customer’ implies that service users have a choice over the use of services and is closely bound with ideas of the market; ‘client’, although originally a term identified with a professional relationship (such as with a lawyer) is increasingly considered to be demeaning; ‘citizen’ does not have the required specificity. ‘Service user’ appears to overcome these problems, although it is problematic in that it has connotations of defining people only in relation to service.

1.2.1.1 The central importance of service users’ experiences

There are four reasons for considering service users as central to any study of LAC and SCARF: service users are partners in the case managed intervention, their knowledge of the systems is unique, a full understanding of discourses requires consideration of their interpretation of the texts and increasingly, any claim to legitimate ‘knowledge’ of these systems requires their involvement.

The first reason for focusing on service users is a practical one, that of needing to assess the experiences of these ‘new’ partners in the case management process. LAC and SCARF have been designed with service users’ participation in mind. Children, young people and their parents are ‘co-animators’ and ‘co-consumers’ of the texts (Fairclough, 1992) and the systems’ authors have aimed to produce outcomes relevant to service users. The extent to which service users have understood interventions and participated can only be estimated by engaging with service users themselves in research.
Secondly, service users’ experiences are critical to the theoretical framework of this study. That framework is one of social constructionism drawing on the work of French philosopher, Michel Foucault, which led to an interest in the unique contribution that service users can make to ‘knowledge’. Foucault’s theory is explored in detail in Chapter 3. Here, it is sufficient to say that there are four aspects of Foucault’s theory that indicate the importance of service users (Olssen, 2006). Firstly, the study of knowledge, such as that claimed in case management systems, should not only concern itself with ‘regulated and legitimate forms of power in central locations, but at the extremities, at the points where it becomes capillary, that is regional and local forms and institutions’ (Olssen, 2006 p.21). Secondly, the analysis of power and knowledge should not only be undertaken at the level of conscious intent, but at the level of real practice. Thirdly, power must be analysed, not as a form of domination, but as a practice in a net-like organisation (involving, in this case, both social workers and service users). Finally, power must be analysed for the ways it permeates from the base: ‘one must conduct an ascending analysis of power starting from its infinitesimal mechanisms’ (Olssen, 2006 p.21). Emphasis on service users’ experiences is particularly crucial in the study of case management, as social workers are sharply divided over the ‘knowledge’ underpinning case management systems and the debate is effectively stalled (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004). I will argue that claims made on behalf of service users do not necessarily reflect service users’ ‘subject position’ or their ‘subjugated knowledge’.

My third reason to focus on service users is based on theories related to analysis of discourse. Fairclough (1992) points to the importance of understanding the ‘consumption’ (or interpretation) of texts in analysing discourses. The ‘lived experience’ of case management is therefore critical to understanding LAC and SCARF. A theoretical discussion of Fairclough’s framework is described in Chapter 4.

Finally, I focus on service users because societal expectations of ‘democratisation’ make service users’ contribution important to claims of legitimate knowledge about case management (Fairclough 1992). In Chapter 3, I argue that democratisation is a significant tendency in contemporary society; it has been important in the development of case management as well as more generally in human services. Dominant
professional views are now seen to be limited as a basis of knowledge. For example, adult views of children’s experiences are no longer seen as definitive and claims made on behalf of Indigenous people are no longer seen as legitimate when they come from non-Indigenous authorities.

1.2.1.2 Limitations of existing service user studies

Given this focus on service users, the existing international and local studies of LAC, SCARF and its precursor the Assessment Framework are not an adequate basis for understanding Australian service users’ responses to case management. There was a range of problems with existing studies, as will be further described in Chapter 2.

The initial difficulty with the studies was that they were undertaken over short time-frames in the early implementation of LAC and SCARF. This was probably the result of policy requirements arising from pressure for a rapid decision on the use LAC. Nevertheless, studies of LAC were undertaken when the systems were new to social workers who may have resisted their introduction. Many pilot project evaluations were not able to use LAC in its final local format; this was the case in Australia (Wise, 1999, 2003b) and Scotland (Francis, 2002; Wheelaghan & Hill, 2000). A notable example of this inappropriateness was the Victorian study that used forms that referred to the English school systems and health issues (Wise, 1999). Early studies were also undertaken when service users had only very time-limited experience of using the systems, and frequently were unclear how much actual experience young people had of using LAC (for example CREATE, 2004; Wise 1999). It was also sometimes even unclear how many children and young people with experience of the system were actually involved in some studies (such as Munro, 2001; Thomas & O’Kane 1999).

A further limitation of these implementation studies is that published reports of the early research were often not clear about research methods. Some findings were reported by a third party who had not been involved in the research design or implementation (Francis, 2002). Only one study had included service users in establishing the research goals and processes (CREATE, 2004) and that study was not published and only reported a brief description of method. In the Scottish research, there was also limited documentation of
method (Francis, 2002). Furthermore, there was usually only limited reporting of the researchers’ value base, though in some cases this limitation was acknowledged:

The authors believe that, once the Assessment Framework has been fully embedded within social services, and professionals in other relevant agencies conversant with it, an objective evaluation should be carried out (Cleaver & Walker, 2004 p.270).

Subsequent international research, while better documented, has limited applicability to Australia. Although Canadian studies of LAC included participants with three years’ experience of using the system (Drolet & Sauve-Kobylecki, 2006; Kufeldt et al., 2007; Kufeldt, Simard, Vachon, Baker & Andrews, 2000; Poirier, Simard, Demarais, Dumont & Richards, 2006), these researchers only evaluated part of the system, that is, the Assessment and Action Records. The evaluation of the Assessment Framework (Cleaver & Walker, 2004) is limited in its applicability to SCARF, because of the substantial differences between the United Kingdom and Australian systems.

The scope of all of these studies has also been narrow. No studies involved research with children less than 10 years of age. Birth parents were included in only two studies: the Canadian study of LAC (Kufeldt, McGilligan, Klein & Rideout, 2006; Kufeldt, Simard, Vachon, Baker & Andrews, 2000) and the English study of the Assessment Framework (Clever & Walker, 2004; Millar & Corby, 2006). Overall, my calculations indicated that a total of less than a hundred young people and their parents had participated in early studies.

Though there has been some recent Australian research conducted on service users’ experiences of programs using case management, these evaluations were either conducted early in service users’ relationships with social workers, or they did not focus specifically on the case management aspects of the intervention. Although an important contribution to the implementation of case management, Fernandez’s study of the Assessment Framework in Australia did not include direct research with service users, relying instead on social workers’ reports (Fernandez & Romeo, 2003). Later evaluations of welfare programs using case management have directly involved service
users with experience of LAC (Fernandez 2006a, 2006b, 2007c) and SCARF (Fernandez, 2004, 2006a, 2007a), but none of these studies has involved completed interventions, nor did any focus specifically on the contribution of the case management systems.

1.2.1.3 The contribution of this study to understanding service users’ experiences

This study aimed to overcome limitations in the scope and methods of previous research and ensure that findings were relevant to Australians. I have aimed to document my method, and to consider the role of power relations in the research setting, particularly where it serves to subjugate the ‘voices’ of service users. I explored a wide range of issues and, uniquely, examine service users’ experiences with ICT in child welfare interventions.

This study uses qualitative methods to explore service users’ experiences. The number of participants involved was that which was possible within the resource constraints of a PhD project. The findings relate to the experiences of the participating service users and I do not make wider claims about the generalisability of the findings (although, as Williams argues (2001) that may be inevitable to an extent). Nevertheless, the thirty-two participants represent a larger number than in most of the studies described below and have been chosen to give a broad spread of ages, service types and social situation.

I have attempted to study a wide range of characteristics of case management. In relation to the social work aims of case managed interventions, I explored service users’ experiences of assistance, control and concepts of child development. I examined service users’ experiences of behavioural norms and values that they find unacceptable. The study explored service users’ experiences of the processes of the case managed intervention. I examined the planning processes on which case management is based, such as the use of time frames and frameworks for decision making, review, and interagency collaboration. I was particularly interested in one process of critical importance to social work interventions, that is, the attempt by authors to alter the power relationships in child welfare through increased participation by service users and reduced opportunities for social workers to exercise power.

19
The methods used in this study were also substantially different from those of other studies, as they aimed to consider how power may subjugate service users’ voices and, where possible, address this issue or take account of it in the findings. I used completed interventions, research being conducted at a time when service users were no longer so subject to the power of the welfare agency. I focused on the long-term use of case management systems (duration of use ranged from one to eight years) in an attempt to provide a greater depth of experience of interventions. I also attempted to identify the operation of power including the role of the industry partner, gatekeepers and barriers to participation in the study. I have attempted to minimise the possibility of my own exercise of power in the study. In identifying the discourses to be explored with service users, I did not rely on my own interpretation, but used a number of texts and examined them using text oriented discourse analysis (TODA).

Importantly, this study considered service users’ experiences of the greater reliance on written texts in child welfare interventions and the emerging impact of ICT. This is an issue raised in implementation literature on case management, but not addressed in ongoing Australian research. Advocates claim that standardised recording can improve case management for the individual child, as well as enabling data collection that could provide a base to reform of child welfare services (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006). Commentators have identified advantages in gathering data for practitioners (Kerslake, 1998; Parker, 1998), managers (Davies, 1998) and researchers ( Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006). From the earliest social work literature however, some social work academics have been concerned about the alienating nature of paper-based systems for service users: the unattractive forms (Wheelaghan & Hill, 2000), their length (Kufeldt, Simard, Vachon, Baker & Andrews, 2000), literacy requirements (CREATE, 2004), potential for loss of confidentiality and privacy (Munro, 2001), the checklist format (Francis, 2002), and the language used (Francis, 2002). These features of the text are seen to be particularly alienating to young people (Bell, 1998-99; Knight & Caveney, 1998). This study also identified a new aspect of case management in that it takes into account the growing use of ICT in case managed child welfare interventions.
The technology used in social work interventions is frequently assumed and taken for granted as ‘invisible’ (despite the strong response to the use of written text described above). I argue that understanding the impact of paper-based ‘technologies’ needs to be recognised in social work; it is an issue for all situations in which files are kept and social workers make written records. Case management systems have merely highlighted the issues of the ability to initiate, distribute and interpret texts. An interest in technology is even more important to consider, given the massive shift, occurring largely over the past twenty years, since the development of the internet, towards ICT. Exploration of service users’ responses to existing technology and their use of ICT is therefore an integral part of any consideration of the development of LAC and SCARF. I argue that it is not possible to ignore the immediate impact of ICT, as its use is already seeping into communication between social workers and being used as an active driver in the development of case management. SCARF has been shaped by consideration of ICT’s use, LAC is also available electronically and in the United Kingdom, there has been a strong focus on computer-based systems in the integration of their new system (Jones, 2006).

**1.2.2 Could recent developments in ICT contribute to children’s welfare if integrated into case management systems, and if so how?**

My second research question concerns the use of new technologies in conjunction with case management in child welfare. LAC and SCARF were originally developed as paper-based systems but, since their introduction, there has been rapid spread of ICT in the general community and within child welfare. Yet in social work practice, there is an inchoate understanding of the impact of mobile phones and the internet, despite increasing use of ICT for data collection and communication among social workers.

There are three reasons to consider the use of ICT in child welfare. Firstly, to explore whether problems with the existing paper-based technology can be addressed through changing the technology. Secondly, to determine whether the use of ICT could bring advantages to communication in child welfare services. (ICT has been used in child
welfare predominantly for its ‘information’ application, for the collation and organisation of data (Parton, 2008); however, ICT constantly offers new opportunities for communication, which are increasingly taken up in the wider community (Crystal, 2006). Currently, there is little information regarding the potential of ICT in child welfare (Tregeagle & Darcy, 2007). The third reason to consider the use of ICT is that there may be dangers in not exploring how ICT is currently being used in child welfare practice. The seamless way technology enters social practices means that the implications for child welfare may not be well understood. There is a danger that service users may be disadvantaged in welfare interventions, as well as in the wider community, unless their limited use of ICT is addressed.

This study also addresses the question of how feasible it may be to increase the use of ICT with service users. It is unclear how many service users have access to mobile phones and the internet and what barriers they encounter in using ICT. It is also unclear how interested they are in using ICT with their social workers and the implications of ICT for service user-social worker communication.

1.2.3 How could the answers to these questions inform the future development of case management systems?

My third research question concerns how these findings could be used in the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF. This study aims to contribute the accounts of some Australian service users to the development of case management. Service users are however, not the only people potentially interested in the development of LAC and SCARF.

I argue that development of LAC and SCARF will be affected by change that will be both inevitable and constrained. I draw on Foucault’s concept of ‘discourses’ and their ‘rules of formation’, to explore how these changing discourses may affect case management. I identify those who are ‘authorised to speak’, the ‘orders of discourse’ in which current case management systems are ‘maintained’ and the impact of other ‘non-discursive’ factors that may affect the way that case management develops. I also draw
on Foucault’s concept of ‘power/knowledge’ to understand how these changes may occur. (Foucault’s theories are explored in detail in Chapter 3).

Decisions about how case management systems may develop will also be made in situations involving the exercise of power. In order for LAC and SCARF to be developed to reflect service users’ experiences, consideration needs to be given to these power relations. I explore the social work literature to identify ‘subject positions’ of social work academics.

1.3 THE ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

The following is a guide to the scope and limitations of the thesis.

1.3.1 The organisation of chapters

Chapter 2 provides background to this thesis. I describe the development of LAC and SCARF with particular reference to Australia child welfare systems. I examine changes to LAC and the Assessment Framework (which evolved into SCARF), which have occurred since initial implementation, to explore changes in discourse over that time. Finally, I discuss the controversies over these case management systems in the social work literature. This provides a basis for understanding the ‘subject positions’ of Australian developers and social work academics on child welfare case management. This is important to subsequent discourse analysis and to understanding the processes involved in redeveloping LAC and SCARF. The literature clearly shows the areas of resistance offered by social work academics to case management systems.

In Chapter 3, I identify a theoretical approach to understanding LAC and SCARF and my three research questions. Drawing on Foucault’s theories of discourse, I explore case management systems as ‘texts’ embodying competing discourses and as complex mixes of ‘statements’. These discourses manifest the operation of a regime of power/knowledge that has led to the ‘subjugation’ of service users’ knowledge. LAC and SCARF are maintained within discourses of social work, management and childhood and they express trends in ‘orders of discourse’ towards ‘democratisation’ and
‘technologisation’ (Fairclough 1992). These discourses and their constituent ‘statements’ can be seen in contemporary child welfare theories concerning permanency planning, evidence-based practice, individualised care planning and interagency collaboration. I further examine case management as written text and explore social constructionist theories of technology to examine the impact of ‘pen and paper’ based systems, as well as new technologies. I use the theoretical view of technology as both shaped by and shaping social practices and employ Hutchby’s (2001) concept of ‘affordances’ (those aspects of a technology that frame how it may be used), to explore how technologies may affect social processes. I use Foucault’s theory to approach my study on service users by examining the relationship between discourses and individuals. I also draw on Foucault’s concepts of social change using both the idea of ‘rules of formation’ and power. Chapter 3 describes the implication of my theoretical position for an understanding of power relations within the case management systems, as well as for research methods and analysis.

Chapter 4 describes the methodologies and methods that arise from my theoretical position. I used qualitative techniques, drawing on text oriented discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992) to analyse three sets of texts. I study the social work literature on LAC and SCARF to analyse discourse by understanding the production of these texts. Because the academic literature on LAC and SCARF is itself affected by power relations amongst social workers, and because I am also concerned to understand discourses through their interpretation, this is not an adequate basis for discourse analysis. The second set of texts that I explore is the LAC and SCARF forms. Texts have an important impact on social practices (Fairclough 1992) and, drawing on Fairclough’s method (1992), I focus particularly on the textual features and discursive practices of the forms. I then use the findings on these two sets of texts as the basis for developing my third set of texts: semi-structured interviews with service users. Following Fairclough’s view in which analysis of the ‘consumption’ of a text is essential for understanding discourses, I analyse the transcripts of these interviews, bearing in mind the specific conditions of the production of these texts. I explore diverse ‘subject positions’, ‘subjugated discourses’, ‘subjectification’ and ‘resistance’ in the production (Alvesson, 2002a). I particularly consider the role of power in my own attempts to generate knowledge in each stage of
the service user study: in design, implementation and interpretation. Using the corpus of texts has the advantage of expanding the range of discourses and statements and of limiting my interpretation of discourses.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 describe the findings of my study in relation to the social work aims, planning processes, use of written text and power relations in LAC and SCARF. I identify discourses of social work, management, childhood and ‘democratisation’ and their constituent statements (Foucault’s term for claims to truth within a discourse) and seek to understand service users’ knowledge about LAC and SCARF-based interventions. Chapter 5 describes the aim of the social work intervention. After identifying two significant social work ‘statements’, that is, ‘assistance’ and ‘control’ in LAC and SCARF, I explore service users’ descriptions of their experiences. I also examine the goals for children’s development in the texts and how these reflect ‘developmentalism’ and the ‘new children’s paradigm’. Chapter 6 describes findings concerning the processes of intervention, particularly planning processes designed into the systems such as time-limits, decision making, reviews, interagency collaboration and the extensive recording in written texts. Chapter 7 explores power relations, a particularly important element of social work interventions. The authors of LAC and SCARF have attempted to increase service user participation and reduce social workers’ opportunities to exercise power in the welfare intervention. My findings pose a challenge to the view of power that is embodied in LAC and SCARF. Concepts of childhood and the implications for opportunities for children and young people to exercise power are also problematic. Young people identify that when they live with their parents they are frequently excluded from participatory opportunities. Young people also identified stereotyped views of age-related behaviour which do not fit their experience.

Chapter 8 explores the question of the potential of ICT to contribute to children’s welfare. This chapter describes three reasons to consider the use of ICT in conjunction with case management systems. Firstly, problems with the existing pen and paper technology; secondly, the new communication possibilities, and finally, the need to consider the growing use of ICT in society as a whole, and; the implication this has for
service users. ICT in welfare is primarily used by managers and social workers for information collection or communication between professionals. Yet there are important communication possibilities being overlooked. I draw on Fairclough’s (1992) concept of discursive practices textual feature to explore how changes in technology could affect social work practices. Findings from the study on service users’ experience of ICT show that their access to ICT and the ways they employ it are dependent on social processes. Service users’ ability to use ICT in child welfare interventions is significantly affected by their socio-economic status, literacy levels and the power of social workers and managers to co-opt the technology. These barriers would need to be addressed before ICT could be used with case management systems.

The final two chapters, I synthesise the findings. In Chapter 9 I integrate the findings on the service user study with understandings of the potential of ICT. I then address the question of how the findings of the study may inform the development of LAC and SCARF. I draw on the findings on the discourses underpinning LAC and SCARF to identify the ‘orders of discourse’ constraining and changing LAC and SCARF. I also identify the ‘subject positions’ of some groups of individuals, to explore the potential for change in LAC and SCARF texts. This analysis shows that change in these systems will be inevitable, constrained, complex and highly contested, but there may be opportunities to address service users’ issues.

Chapter 10 reflects on broader issues identified in this study for the long term development of social work case management systems in child welfare practice. I examine the potential importance of service users’ knowledge and the need for ongoing research and methods that can explore their experiences. I describe the division among social workers on discourses relevant to child welfare and the limited interrogation of some wider societal tendencies in ‘orders of discourse’ in child welfare commentary. I note the increasing reliance on written text and the growing impact of technology on social workers and service users. Finally, I examine the immediate policy implications for developers of case management systems, including the need for future research.
1.3.2 The boundaries of this thesis

This study aims to contribute to the ongoing development of LAC and SCARF and assumes their ongoing use. This study does not compare case managed interventions with interventions occurring without a case management system, nor make recommendations as to whether case management should be used.

The study is concerned with the nature of case management in ‘lived’ experience of practice and does not analyse the individual factors affecting practice. It does not identify the ways that individual social workers or carers may have used the case management system and the impact of this variation on the intervention. Nor does it attempt to identify variables that might affect the intervention or the outcomes for individuals. A case management system is only one element in a service user’s experience of a welfare intervention and factors such as social workers’ individual qualities, the nature of the welfare program and carers’ skills have not been considered. Such a task would be difficult given the numerous factors at play in the outcomes of child welfare interventions.

Finally, this study does not address the issues of cultural care planning for children entering out of home care. This omission was the result of consultation with Indigenous groups who requested that broader research on the impact of culture (for all children) should be the subject of a specialised research project with extensive resources, undertaken by Indigenous-led researchers. A subsequent research project arising from this thesis is currently underway to meet this need and I am a member of the management committee overseeing this work.

1.4 Conclusion

This study comes at a critical point for the welfare of children and young people. LAC and SCARF have now been established in welfare practice for over a decade and are integrated into social work practice in a way that allows for their reassessment. Furthermore, the impact of changes since implementation is becoming increasingly apparent.
Case management systems represent significant attempts at reform of child welfare in the light of widespread criticism and historical difficulties in reforming child welfare services. I aim to contribute to the ongoing development of that case management by addressing limitations in research for Australian child welfare and by examining the long term use of case management systems. Service users’ experiences are critical for this reassessment, as they are supposedly now partners and central to interventions. From the perspective of theory, service users can make a unique contribution to social work knowledge and, without their input; claims to knowledge are less legitimate. Service users’ knowledge may, however, be readily subjugated in the process of development of LAC and SCARF, and despite the claims made on their behalf, there is, as yet, only limited existing research on their views.

The study aims to develop a theoretical basis from which to understand case management and methodology and methods that identify and explore discourses, particularly focused on the experiences of service users. I examine LAC and SCARF together because of their historical interconnection, although I am careful to distinguish between the two as there are significant differences. I examine the social work aims, processes and power relations, written text and the growing impact of ICT in case managed interventions. I then explore how change may occur in these systems and how ICT could address issues for service users.
Chapter 2

Background: The origins of and academic response to case management systems

This chapter provides a background to LAC and SCARF; it locates these case management systems within social work ‘knowledge’ at a particular time and place. The chapter is in two parts: firstly, I describe the history of the development of case management systems and the reasons that some Australians have promoted their use, and secondly, I identify the responses to these systems in the social work literature. These responses reveal a highly polarised debate in which there is little common ground.

The chapter describes previously undocumented issues. I explore the history of LAC and SCARF in Australia and the reasons why some Australians were interested in these systems. I outline changes in LAC and SCARF since their initial introduction. I consider the impact of ICT on child welfare case management systems - an issue of growing importance. I also identify changes to participatory strategies evident in SCARF and recent changes to LAC in some jurisdictions.

This chapter provides an important basis, referred to in subsequent chapters, to consider the factors influencing the development of LAC and SCARF. I identify the ‘subject positions’ of social work academics that will have a role in the development of LAC and SCARF. I attempt to disentangle debate over the issues of social work aims, processes and power relations between service users and social workers in child welfare interventions, and finally I examine the ways that service users’ experiences have been employed within the debate.
2.1 THE UNITED KINGDOM ORIGINS OF AUSTRALIAN CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Both LAC and SCARF originated in the United Kingdom and were substantially changed to adapt to Australian service systems and local legislation. Both systems have been taken up internationally but have been altered in some settings to reflect local requirements and contextual changes over time.

2.1.1 The development of child welfare case management

Development of child welfare case management was a response to concerns about outcomes for children in out of home care in the United Kingdom. LAC was conceived in 1987 at a meeting of academics from eight universities and senior officials from the United Kingdom Department of Health (Parker, Ward, Jackson, Aldgate, & Wedge, 1991). The Working Party on Child Care Outcomes, established at this meeting, was charged with development of LAC to address a service system characterised by ‘drift, pessimism and professional inertia’ (Clare, 2003 p.19). Although LAC’s origins began in the research interests of social work academics, ‘it was firmly established at an early date that outcome measures must be useful to practitioners as well as researchers’ (Parker et al., 1991 p.8). Development of LAC was informed by theory (1987–91), a series of pilot studies (1991–95), and commissioned research on parents’ values. Between 1995-98, LAC was implemented by local authorities in England with funding provided by central government. A detailed history of the development of LAC can be found in the original two reports on the project (Parker et al., 1991; Ward, 1995), the LAC Reader (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996), and in summary form by Yeatman and Penglase (2004).

---

3 The authors of LAC were: Dr Jane Aldgate, Mr Roger Bullock, Dr Carolyn Davies, Mrs Sonia Jackson, Professor Martin Knapp, Mr Peter McCoy, Professor Roy Parker, Professor Barbara Tizard, Professor John Triseliotis, Dr Harriett Ward and Professor Peter Wedge. The United Kingdom Department of Health published the Assessment Framework informed by academic studies (Seden, 2001), the Learning Materials Development Group and the development of the Reader (Horwarth, 2001). SCARF development in Australia was overseen by LAC Project manager, Sue Tolley, in collaboration with an implementation team of Barnardos Australia welfare workers and managers (Tolley, 2005).
The United Kingdom Government and academic advocates of the LAC approach subsequently developed a second case management system known as the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (Assessment Framework), in this case, for children ‘in need’ of services, but who were living in their own family’s homes (Seden, Sinclair, Robbins, & Pont, 2001). The Assessment Framework was modelled on LAC and was implemented by Local Authorities in England in 2001 and Wales in 2002 (Garrett, 2003b). The development of the Assessment Framework has been documented in relation to its research basis (Seden et al., 2001), its training material (Horwath, 2001) and evaluation (Cleaver & Walker, 2004). A description of its history can be found in Calder and Hackett (2003).

2.1.2 The adaptation of LAC in Australia

Australian social work academics and non-government agencies were quick to explore the possibilities of the case management systems. Despite the different cultural setting and service system, advocates believed that aspects of these case management systems would be of particular benefit to vulnerable Australian children.

In 1993, social work academic Mike Clare implemented the first trial of LAC in Western Australia (Clare, 1997). Clare was concerned to address ‘the poor quality of parenting provided by the ‘administrative parent’’ (Clare, 1997 p. 29). He felt LAC had particular relevance to Australia because it facilitated the integration of research and practice, and had the capacity to enhance case recording, staff supervision and review of decision-making. He identified a potential role for LAC to allow the aggregation of data for research and planning. Clare believed that LAC could address problems with Australia’s service system that had been brought about by fragmented policies, single-issue and competitive welfare programs:

The Australian child welfare system is unhelpfully fragmented at legislative, budgetary, standard setting and audit levels (Clare, 2003 p.21).

As a result of the Western Australian trial, the State Government adopted LAC in government programs (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006), and a few non-government agencies also began to use it.
In 1996, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) undertook a second Australian trial, in this case in the State of Victoria (Wise, 1999). This research was initiated at the request of non-government welfare agencies, which were concerned at poor outcomes experienced by children. Agencies were interested in LAC because of the way it addressed standards in care, deficiencies in monitoring children’s welfare, and poor recording (Wise, 2003c). Despite the evaluation’s positive overall findings, implementation did not proceed.

It was not until 1997 that the implementation of LAC was begun in eastern Australia. This was achieved by a coalition of University of New South Wales and a non-government agency, Barnardos Australia. The coalition was formed after Elizabeth Fernandez, from the University, visited England to assess LAC in 1995. On her return, she joined with Barnardos Australia, which had become aware of LAC through the Western Australian trial. Barnardos Australia saw the adaptation of LAC in Australia as a way of fulfilling its mission to contribute to the welfare of all ‘disadvantaged children in Australia with child protection needs’ (Barnardos Australia Corporate Plan, 1998).

The partnership organisation, known as the LAC Project, took up the case management system because of interest in improving outcomes for individual children, and to potentially reform child welfare service systems (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006). Managers saw the potential for LAC to address the problems of quality of practice through providing a link between research and practice:

[LAC is] a guided practice tool that helps to translate research findings into direct welfare practice, and bridges the gap that so often exists between theory and what is understood as best practice, and the application of best practice in the field (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006 p.394).

Underpinning this interest was a concern to ensure that social workers actually visited children and assessed and reliably followed through with the issues identified (Dixon 2001a). The LAC Project managers also valued the changed relationship between social workers and service users, as participation was strongly valued by the welfare agency (Yeatman et al., 2009). The LAC Project managers were also interested in the system’s
potential to improve the collection of data, which they believed to be central to systemic reform (Yeatman et al., 2009).

Barnardos implemented LAC with all 900 children in its out-of-home care programs in 1997, and the LAC Project adapted the system to State and Territory legislation (Dixon, 2001a). The LAC Project obtained a license for eastern Australia from the United Kingdom Department of Health and distributed LAC through ‘end-license’ agreements ‘at cost’ to other welfare agencies, and free to Indigenous agencies. Intellectual property was maintained by the United Kingdom Department of Health, which needed to approve local changes.

LAC was subsequently taken up in a number of States and Territories both by governments and by non-government agencies (Cheers, Kufeldt, Klein & Rideout, 2007). In 2000, the Australian Capital Territory Government signed an ‘end user’ agreement and began to use LAC for all children in care in the Territory. In Victoria, a non-government agency followed, and in 2002, the Victorian State Government funded LAC for all out-of-home care programs in that State (Champion & Burke, 2006). In 2003-04 the Tasmanian Government adopted the system. By 2006, twenty non-government agencies in NSW and Queensland had entered into licensing agreements. By 2006, over half the children in residential and foster care in eastern Australia were using LAC, although Assessment and Action Records (AARs) were not recommended for Indigenous children.

Despite this growth, there was resistance to LAC by some government departments, and by 2008, the number of children using the system had reduced to only one-third of children in foster and residential care. The majority of Australian State and Territory governments did not take it up (that is New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Northern Territory) and by 2007, both Western Australia and Tasmania had stopped using LAC. There is no publicly available information on these decisions; however, the LAC Project identified worker resistance to case management and the development of alternate databases, as central to these decisions (noted in private correspondence).
2.1.3 The development of SCARF in Australia

The LAC Project managers were enthusiastic about the impact of LAC and in 1999 entered into an agreement to join the English trials of the sister project, the Assessment Framework for children ‘in need’ living in their own homes with their parents (Tolley, 2000). They began a local trial within Barnardos family support welfare programs. A second trial of the Assessment Framework was simultaneously undertaken independently by Anglicare Victoria (Tolley, 2005b; Wise, 2003a). Both The LAC Project (Fernandez & Romeo, 2003) and Anglicare ultimately considered that the United Kingdom system was insufficiently ‘family and worker friendly’ (Tolley, 2005b p.16; Wise, 2003a). Anglicare discontinued the use of the Assessment Framework, but the LAC Project redeveloped the system over the following four years (Fernandez & Romeo 2003).

The LAC Project managers’ interest in the Assessment Framework stemmed from their concern to raise the standards of family support services’ decision making and to improve social workers’ performance:

[There were] two major benefits to service delivery ... Establishing a common language had the effect of improving communication and reducing erroneous decision making. Secondly, workers using SCARF reported that they paid greater attention to the effect of their work on the needs of the children (Tolley, 2005b p.16).

The LAC Project managers were not alone in their interest in the Assessment Framework – the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) also advocated its use, specifically in statutory child welfare services, but also more generally (Wise, 2003a). AIFS saw it as a way of remediating ongoing problems in child protection services in Australia:

Child welfare concerns have drifted to an inappropriate focus on crisis intervention and a punitive approach to child protection intervention at the expense of community-based preventative child welfare programs (Wise, 2003a p.183).
Ultimately, the LAC Project, through a team of Barnardos social workers and managers, evaluated by Fernandez (2003), redesigned the Assessment Framework by substantially modifying its length and complexity (Tolley, 2000). The final format, known as SCARF, retained the core principles of the Assessment Framework in that it remained child-centered, adhered to the LAC developmental domains, and recognised the interface between a child and his or her family and social environment. SCARF was described by its developers as maintaining key values: partnership with children and families; interagency collaboration; evidence-based practices; and a strengths-based focus (Tolley, 2005b). The current format is outlined in Appendix 2.

The changes that they introduced in SCARF nevertheless involved significant alterations to the structure, detail, participation strategies and the use of ICT. These changes are described here in detail as they are not publically documented elsewhere. The structure of the Assessment Framework forms was altered so that planning could be undertaken in one of two ways: either through a preliminary detailed assessment or through development of an immediate Action Plan, with a detailed assessment following. Initial referral involved the whole family, rather than the individual child. The Australian development team maintained, however, that this was not significant:

...as the basic assessment required each child to have a separate assessment conducted of their developmental strengths and needs as well as the parenting capacity affecting them individually (Tolley, 2005a p.1).

Detail was also reduced. The United Kingdom’s ‘Core Assessment Record’, which was seen as too time consuming (taking 3–4 months to complete), was replaced by a shorter process. The detail of the Assessment Framework was seen to be overwhelming, and a separate set of forms called ‘Add-Its’ were developed, to be completed only where particular circumstances warranted. Detailed assessment based on age and ‘domains’ was segregated into ‘Add-Its’, that is, a second tier of forms was instituted (see Appendix 3). The initial planning and the core assessments were also shortened by removing the ‘tick-box’ format. Changes were made to the age categories of children, and guidance notes were made more relevant to local conditions. No specific text based
provisions were made for participation of service users: while they remained ‘co-animators’ of the forms, there were no specific Consultation Papers, as in LAC. In addition, changes were made to enable SCARF to be adapted to ICT:

Initial changes were made to reduce duplication of workers and shorten the process overall, making the tools a little more attractive to clients ... however, many changes were influenced by the fact that the Framework was being converted into an electronic data-base tool (Tolley, 2005a p.3).

The process of the development of SCARF had been dominated by workers (Tolley 2005a) and informed by research that relied on workers’ interpretations of service users’ views (Fernandez & Romeo, 2003).

The complete version of SCARF was fully implemented within Barnardos’ programs in 2004. The LAC Project actively promoted SCARF to Australian non-government agencies, and by 2008, at the time this study was completed, 47 non-government agencies were using SCARF. Barnardos subsequently began work on an electronic version.

2.1.4 The first decade: ICT and the erosion of participatory strategies

Australia was not the only country to make local adaptations of the United Kingdom LAC and Assessment Framework, and these systems were now becoming significantly different across the world. Two reasons for this fragmentation were the erosion of the participatory practices that had aimed to involve service users in decision-making, and the increasing use of ICT for data collection.

The original United Kingdom case management systems were taken up internationally (under license), and LAC was adapted to local conditions in Canada, Sweden, USA, Norway, Belgium, Israel, Scotland (Cheers, 2006), and the Assessment Framework in Ireland (Buckley, 2008). In Canada, only one part of LAC (the Assessment and Action Records) was adopted, and Canadian researchers subsequently altered the original AARs (known thereafter as OnLAC), to allow comparison with the Canadian National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (Kufeldt, Cheers, Klein & Rideout, 2007). In
Sweden, a modified and revised version was developed from the Canadian forms (Khoo, Nygren, & Hyvonen, 2006). Irish academics developed a local version of the Assessment Framework (Buckley, 2008). In England and Sweden, the systems were entirely changed as LAC and the Assessment Framework were merged into an Integrated Children’s System (ICS) (Jones, 2006). In Australia, the systems also began to fragment as the result of individual state government’s making changes, such as the Victorian Government modifying LAC forms in response to local data requirements (Champion & Burke, 2006).

One feature of the systems that appeared to be ‘watered down’ in these changes was the requirement for service user participation. This tendency has been noted above in the development of SCARF. It can also be seen in Victoria, where worker resistance to having to sign forms led to this provision being dropped (noted in discussion with the LAC Project). The difficulty of enforcing participation has been noted in checks of compliance undertaken by the NSW Children’s Guardians (private correspondence to Barnardos Australia on 2007 Case File Audit).

A second significant change has been the adaptation of case management systems to ICT to make data collection easier for managers and researchers (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006; Jones, 2006; Kerslake, 1998). In England, LAC data were used in conjunction with the United Kingdom Government’s Quality Protects program (Garrett, 2003a), and the subsequent integration of LAC and the Assessment Framework was specifically designed to generate data for service costing and research (Jones, 2006). LAC had been used as the basis of research, although not altogether successfully:

In part because instruments designed to aid practice in individual cases have not adapted easily to the hoped for dual role [of practice and research], and in part because the completion rates have been patchy and often poor (Bailey, Thoburn, & Wakeham, 2002 p.189).

LAC data has been used increasingly for research in Canada and Australia. An Australian and Canadian partnership was developed to compare international outcomes for children and young people using the LAC AARs (Cheers, Kufeldt, Klein, & Rideout,
Canadian researchers also used LAC to assess local outcomes (for example, Flynn, Robitaille & Ghazal, 2006; Legault & Moffat, 2006). Australian researchers also began to use LAC data to monitor outcomes for cohorts of children (Wise & Champion, 2008). A number of policy makers have identified the standardisation of case management systems as important for assessing systems outcomes for policy development (Wise, 2003c), for supervising caseworkers, and assessing individual service performance (Dixon, 2001a). In New South Wales, compliance with LAC has been used by agencies to demonstrate accreditation by the Office of the Children’s Guardian.

In many countries, social work managers were interested in the case management system’s capacity to collect and store data, and this has subsequently led to interest in using ICT-based systems for data analysis. LAC was never successfully computerised in the United Kingdom (Jones, 2006), but in Australia the application of ICT to case management occurred early. Electronic systems were developed originally to encourage implementation by lessening social workers’ recording tasks (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006). Subsequently, electronic reports were designed for use by individual workers, programs and agencies. Two electronic versions, LACES (Looking After Children Electronic System), and E-SCARF, developed in 2000 and 2007 respectively are used internally in Barnardos, and both systems have been made available to other agencies on a commercial basis.

By the end of 2008, LAC and SCARF were in a stable format and were used in a number of jurisdictions in Australia. The LAC and SCARF forms are routinely adapted to minor administrative or legal changes, leading to alteration of the numbering systems. Electronic data collection, using ICT, was restricted to a small number of welfare agencies. There is no centralised SCARF data, and it is not possible to determine the numbers of children who are using that system; however, by 2007–08, seventeen agencies were using LACES, although only Barnardos Australia used E-SCARF. Active promotion of E-SCARF commenced in 2008 (Briefing paper to the Board of Barnardos Australia).
Table 1. Numbers of Australian Children using LAC and LACES in eastern Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR (and significant milestones)</th>
<th>LAC</th>
<th>LACES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-98 Barnardos NSW and ACT programs implementation</td>
<td>Approx 900 children in Barnardos</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000 Purchase by NSW non-government agencies</td>
<td>Approx 1,100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01 ACT Government implementation</td>
<td>1,329</td>
<td>1,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>1,497</td>
<td>1,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03 Victoria Government implementation</td>
<td>3,545</td>
<td>1,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04 Tasmania Government implementation</td>
<td>5,967</td>
<td>1,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>5,592</td>
<td>1,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06 Tasmanian withdrawal</td>
<td>5,480</td>
<td>1,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>4,732</td>
<td>1,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>4,854</td>
<td>1,639</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.5 Rejection of the United Kingdom’s Integrated Children’s System

When considering the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF in 2005, the LAC Project managers did not automatically adopt the United Kingdom’s merging of LAC and the Assessment Framework into the Integrated Children’s System (ICS). This was because of perceived differences in policy environments between United Kingdom and Australia. The United Kingdom ICS had been developed following a major review of LAC and the Assessment Framework, which had identified the following weaknesses in these systems:
Poor interagency communication, a failure to listen to the views of children themselves, high staff turnover and severe staff shortages leading to *discontinuity in practice, a lack of attention to detail of children’s lives and experiences*, poor record keeping, and limited capacity for storage, retrieving and sharing information (Jones, 2006 p. 403).

This development of the ICS occurred in the context of a major change in policy towards children’s services, in which the work of a number of government departments was integrated and an outcomes approach adopted.

The priority placed on early intervention through greater integration of services *and local accountability that is reflected in ‘Every Child Matters’ provides an important context to understand ICS* (Jones, 2006 p. 402).

Although some of these issues had resonance in Australia, the policy and data contexts there were very different. Furthermore, the United Kingdom experience of technology had also been different from that in Australia; the ICS was the first significant move from manual recording of information to an electronic system. The ICS was not adopted in Australia.

### Table 2. Timeline of the development of LAC, the Assessment Framework and SCARF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>INTERNATIONAL</th>
<th>AUSTRALASIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child Development of LAC Piloting and Revision of LAC Forms in England (Clare,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1994 Canadian testing of draft English forms completed (Lemay, Byrne &amp; Ghazal,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>LAC implemented in English Local Authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Canadian pilot of AARs in six eastern provinces, British Columbia and Ontario</td>
<td>LAC Victorian trial (Wise, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Cheers et al., 2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996 Sweden imports Canadian forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Scottish LAC pilots (Wheelaghan &amp; Hill, 2000)</td>
<td>Implementation by Barnardos Australia and adaptation by LAC Project (Dixon, 2001b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>AUSTRALASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Irish Assessment Framework developed (Buckley, 2008)</td>
<td>Tasmania implements LAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Canadian revision of LAC forms (Flynn, Dudding, &amp; Barber, 2006)</td>
<td>SCARF implemented within Barnardos Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Implementation of English Integrated Children’s System (Jones, 2006) International LAC comparative research project ( Cheers et al., 2005)</td>
<td>Commencement of this research project Western Australia reduces commitment to LAC as it changes its data-base (this is not publicly documented, and is based on reports of The LAC Project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Canadian forms distributed</td>
<td>Marketing of SCARF to non-government agencies in Australia and New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
<td>E-SCARF fully implemented Signing of agreement with Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care to undertake an evaluation of the cultural planning element of LAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial planning of Australian Integrated Children’s System</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 DIVISION AMONG SOCIAL WORK ACADEMICS

During implementation of LAC and the Assessment Framework in the United Kingdom, case management systems became highly contested leading to a strongly polarised debate on their impact on child welfare practice (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004). The following discussion of the social work literature on the case management systems is divided into the areas of aims, processes (including the use of written text), and power relations between service users and social workers. Commentary on the Assessment Framework is included, as it is relevant to SCARF, and there is no specific critique of SCARF. This discussion explores the contribution of service users’ studies in contributing to the academic commentary.

2.2.1 Contest over the social work aims

LAC was initially described by its developers as allowing the identification of what assistance families needed in order to rear their children to a ‘community’ standard. These aims were criticised, however, by those who identified the primary purpose of the case management systems as establishing behavioural norms, and leading towards the effective monitoring and self-policing of behaviour. Claims about what service users viewed as the most significant aims of interventions have been made on behalf of service users by both advocates and critics of case management systems.

2.2.1.1 Debate over the aims of LAC

LAC’s British authors described their central aim as increasing the level of assistance to children ‘beyond “care”, to the active promotion of children’s welfare’ (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.5). By this they meant that interventions were intended to achieve a ‘community’ standard of child-rearing—in contrast to previous practice which had maintained children at the ‘Poor Law’ levels of assistance in which public care was an unattractive option (Parker et al., 1991 p.74). LAC’s authors claimed to have verified the standards they were aiming for, through a study of parents’ child-rearing expectations in England (Ward, 1996). They also claimed that the ‘domains’ and ‘guidance notes’ were based on evidence about what may assist children, young people
and their parents (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996). These claims were subsequently endorsed by researchers in Western Australia (Clare, 1997), Victoria (Wise, 1999), and New South Wales (Dixon, 2001a) as well as Canada (Kufeldt et al., 2005 who also noted the acceptability of LAC for Indigenous parents).

The authors of LAC specified the types of assistance that they wished for children (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996). The LAC Reader, part of the initial training material, stated that the system’s aim was to assist at a higher standard than parents could provide, because ‘Local authorities should have more resources than ordinary parents’ (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p. 9). Emotional support for children should be ‘warm, consistent but authoritative parenting, with much praise and an emphasis on positives’ (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.9). Assistance with health was to be proactive, to maximise children’s potential and to minimise the negative effects of illness or impairment (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.21). Education was to be at a level that would lead to good school experiences and employment as well as contributing to the quality of adult life (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.27). Identity was to be developed to allow an understanding of continuity and the individual’s uniqueness. Family and social relationships were to offer continuity and stability of care, and to recognise birth families and the significance of friends. The goals of self-presentation were to achieve age-related physical care, appropriate choice in relation to clothing and appearance, effective communication, and context-appropriate behaviour. Emotional and behavioural development was to focus on those behaviours that caused distress to children and those caring for them, including problems of over activity, inattention, non-attachment and difficulties in peer relations. Self-care skills were aimed at avoiding ridicule from peers, to bolster low self-esteem, and to allow adaptation to new situations. Furthermore, LAC was to address the needs of Black minority and children with disabilities, coping with the impacts of racism and of individual differences and competencies.

From 1998 onwards, these goals came under increasing scrutiny with critics focused on LAC’s role in the control of both the social workers and families. Initially, criticism focused on LAC as an attempt to control social workers through ‘standardisation’,
which reduced professional judgment and flexibility (Searing, 2003). Case management was seen as limiting traditional professional approaches:

*These authors appear to be questioning the desirability of “guided” practice in a standardised way, seeing this as a displacement of creative and child-responsive professional practice (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004 p. 242).*

In the United Kingdom, LAC came to be identified with the Blair Government’s attempt to co-opt social workers into modernising social work practice (Garrett, 1999a, 1999b, 2003a). This criticism focused on a mix of objections to case management as attempting to control both social workers and families. Initially, disquiet focused on the imposition of middle-class values, and the potential for unanticipated consequences of normative approaches (Knight & Caveney, 1998). Critics claimed that individualised care planning failed to address the systemic problems that caused abuse and neglect (Bell, 1998-99; Knight & Caveney, 1998). This approach became increasingly identified with the Foucauldian concept of ‘governmentality’ and the application of this theory in England (Rose, 1999; Rose & Miller, 1992) through the commentary of Garrett (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b). This critic claimed that social workers were being co-opted to government objectives driven by funding considerations and perceptions that welfare programs had failed to control the ‘dangerous classes’ (Garrett, 2002 p.836). According to Garrett, the study on which the LAC standards were based was unrepresentative and poorly documented and designed for the ‘subjectification’ of families. He criticised claims that LAC was evidenced-based, writing that the domains of behaviour and emotional development, social presentation and identity were class-based judgments and not representative of community standards (Garrett 1999b, 2002, 2003a).

Garrett also criticised the developmentalist concepts underpinning the systems: he was concerned with the concept of children ‘[as] becoming adults’, and the ‘failure to focus on children’s subjective experiences, [while] their right to identify relevant issues for themselves is marginalised’ (Garrett, 1999 pp.35-38). Winter (2006) also criticised the model of childhood underpinning LAC as not allowing for the participation of children, and excluding the accounts of children themselves. LAC was described as drawing on a
view of childhood that emphasised universal and invariant age-related developmental stages. Children were seen as recipients of services on their road to ‘becoming’ adults. The system underestimated children’s own attempts to exercise autonomy and constructed them as adults in the making (and thus questioned their autonomy and rationality).

There has been limited published critique of LAC in Australia (Tregeagle & Treleaven, 2006; Yeatman & Penglase, 2004).

2.2.1.2 The debate over social work aims shifts to the Assessment Framework

Like LAC, the Assessment Framework was advocated by its authors because it addressed concerns about poor outcomes for children and young people—in the case of children living in their own homes (Department of Health, 2003). They claimed the Assessment Framework was based on views of social work practice that rejected ‘child protection’ approaches and sought a more empowering approach to working with families (Gray, 2001; Seden et al., 2001). The Assessment Framework placed the child in the context of their family and the wider community (Seden et al., 2001). It attempted to re-orientate practice from child protection (concerns with the control of parental behaviour and the monitoring of families), to assisting families to rear their children (Jack, 1997), utilising ‘ecological’ and ‘strengths-based’ approaches (Houston, 2002). As such, it was a radical departure from ‘child protection’ approaches to child welfare, which was:

...based on the assumptions that child abuse was a clearly identified phenomenon which was the result of individual pathology and was ‘both predictable and preventable’ ... the emphasis on individual pathology virtually excluded consideration of the effects of poverty, social deprivation and discrimination (Jack, 1997 p.660).

The Assessment Framework reflected growing concerns about child protection in which:

- parents experienced increasing difficulty in getting assistance;
• the concept of neglect had almost disappeared from professional discussion;

• the term ‘abuse’ was used to cover a wide range of behaviours (leading to increases in notification);

• welfare systems and individual social workers were stressed by the level of reported abuse;

• social workers were unable to provide confidentiality because of legal requirements (resulting in the growing alienation of parents, children and young people from professionals who could potentially provide help); and

• medical evidence and legal processes becoming recognised as inappropriate vehicles for changing parenting behaviour (Jack, 1997).

Disillusion with control of parental behaviour through child protection strategies was mirrored in Australia:

The [child protection] experiment is failing. Trying to find and protect the most vulnerable children is now like trying to find a needle in the proverbial haystack, and the system into which we bring children can damage them further (Scott, 2005a p.1).

Despite increasing control over family behaviour, those concerned about children’s welfare claimed that the welfare system remained unable to identify high-risk cases and prevent the ongoing abuse and neglect of children. In light of these problems, policy shifted towards assisting families early in their engagement with services:

The Assessment Framework was designed for use at an early stage of welfare intervention in order to avoid the development of more serious longer-term problems (Cleaver & Walker, 2004 p.13).

Australian developers of SCARF were attracted by the potential to provide more proactive assistance to families and bring uniformity to social workers’ understandings of how to help families. Despite the increased emphasis on family support across Australia
and efforts to integrate statutory child protection services in the wider family support sector, formal standards for services had not been determined. ‘The lack of formal standards, clear definitions and a common language creates difficulties for the sector’ (Tolley, 2005b p.19).

Critics of the Assessment Framework in the United Kingdom immediately identified this new case management system as an extension of LAC, yet another attempt to govern the family. Attempts at control however, were now more dangerous because of the greater numbers of families who were covered (Garrett, 2003b). The nature of the assistance offered was attacked as tokenistic. For example, Parton (2003) objected to the way in which structural problems affecting families were addressed through individualised care planning. The ‘ecological’ approach was criticised because of its similarity to modes of social work practice that focused on adaptation to the environment, rather than altering the social conditions (Garrett, 2003a). Critics focused on the narrowness of the conceptualisation of ‘need’ (Calder & Hackett, 2003, Platt, 2001), and on individualised case management’s inability to tackle social inequality (Houston, 2002). They also expressed concern about conflating of community and societal domains (Calder & Hackett, 2003), and the ‘lack of attention to oppressive practice’ (Horwath, 2002 p.204).

Some critics questioned the ‘balance’ of control and assistance in the Assessment Framework. They claimed that the case management system underestimated child protection issues, particularly in relation to child sexual assault (Calder, 2002; Calder & Hackett, 2003; Platt, 2001). They argued that it was not possible to control parental behaviour while offering support in the way envisaged by the Assessment Framework, namely, ‘to engage parents, develop their trust and retain the child as the focus’ (Calder & Hackett, 2003 p.1). Spratt (2001) similarly raised the issue of the problems social workers had in maintaining assistance to parents while at the same time being expected to maintain the child’s safety. There has been no published critique of the social work aims of SCARF in Australia.
2.2.1.3 Service user studies on the aims of case managed interventions

The authors and local developers have claimed that service users supported their views on the aims of case managed intervention. Critics have been relatively silent about service users’ understanding of goals, focusing more strongly on the processes of intervention described in the following section.

Canadian research explored service users’ experiences of the LAC Assessment and Action Records (Kufeldt et al., 2000, 2007). This report claimed that the investment of time in LAC had been worthwhile. Approximately half the young people reported positively (with a further 27% somewhat positive and 29% having mixed responses). Responses from parents were also positive, with 100% reporting that the use of LAC had been worthwhile. Although service users described assessment as too detailed, when they were asked to identify the questions that needed to be excluded they were unable to do so. The Canadian research claimed that LAC brought issues to the surface, encouraged reflection and stimulated individuals to explore family history, culture and plans for the future. The self-care domain in particular was found to be useful in providing ‘grounds for discussion and knowledge building in the unfamiliar area of independent life’ (Kufeldt et al., 2000 p.189). Fifty-three percent of youth and 50% of parents agreed that they had learnt things from using LAC. The majority of participants felt LAC had the capacity to help them set clear goals and prepare them for independent living. The standard of child rearing underpinning LAC was seen to be appropriate for Canadian families, and service users ‘endorsed the appropriateness of questions and the way in which the questions were asked’ (Kufeldt et al., 2005 p.310).

Researchers in the United Kingdom described service users as responding positively to the Assessment Framework. Many parents said the systems brought insight and transparency of practice (Millar & Corby, 2006), even though some said they did not like the scrutiny of the systems. (This is unsurprising as those undertaking the assessment in the United Kingdom, unlike in Australia, held statutory responsibility). The evaluation of the Assessment Framework indicated that service users were satisfied with their understanding of the assistance, although this was limited: ‘parents expressed
… mixed feelings over the effectiveness of the plan to meet the needs of their child … practically a quarter were certain that the plan would not be helpful’ (Cleaver & Walker, 2004 p.80). Cleaver and Walker noted the importance to service users of practical resources, the time social workers spent with them, and the workers’ understanding of their family. Few children in the study, however, found the plans helpful.

In Australia, Fernandez (2007a) explored adult service users’ experiences of the SCARF-based interventions after they had used the system for one month and six months. In that study, parents said that the assistance they most valued was in the areas of housing and financial management, and they also valued their close relationships with social workers, ‘in itself a significant step’ (Fernandez, 2007a p.20). Fernandez notes service users’ disappointment when social workers did not fully understand the nature of the hardship they were experiencing.

### 2.2.2 Contested views of the processes

The social work literature has focused strongly on the processes introduced in case managed interventions, particularly planning and reliance on written text. Both those promoting case management and its critics have claimed to represent the views of service users.

#### 2.2.2.1 Polarised views of planning and the use of written text in LAC

Advocates of LAC identified standardised planning as the primary advantage of case management systems, particularly those involving contact schedules between social workers and service users, time limits, decision making, review and recording.

Advocates in both the United Kingdom and Australia focused on the importance of the proactive planning introduced through the use of LAC (Dixon 2001a; Jones et al., 1998; Parker 1998; Phillips & Worlock 1996-7; Ward 1998a; Wheelaghan & Hill 2000; Wise 1999). They also claimed that LAC ensured a greater focus on the individual child (Clark & Burke, 1998), and encouraged social workers to spend more time with children (Jackson, 1998). The system’s authors claimed that transparency of planning decisions prevented ‘systems abuse’ (child abuse perpetrated by bureaucratic systems), by
ensuring that social workers monitored the implementation of plans (Ward, 1998). Jackson argued that LAC provided a more reliable response to children because written records led to greater consistency of response than in previous practice (Jackson, 1998). These advantages were to be achieved through a system that appeared to be usable by social workers and acceptable to service users in England (Donovan & Ayres, 1998; Jones et al., 1998; Murphy & Phillips, 1998), Sweden (Jones, Clark, Kufeldt & Norman, 1998), Canada (Jones et al., 1998) and Australia (Clare, 1997; Clark & Bourke, 1998; Owen et al., 1998; Wise 2003b). Commentators pointed to an enhanced continuity between child welfare programs and social workers in agencies, which was increasingly important given high worker turnover (Yeatman & Penglase, 2007). The LAC Reader identified important developments in the extensive review of outcomes, and the increased recording of decisions and information, as key elements of planning (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996). The close relationship between the two was acknowledged:

[LAC was] designed to enable those people responsible for children’s welfare to unpick a line in a chain of events, take a snapshot of a child’s experience and progress, and to decide who is going to be responsible for initiating improvements (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.15).

In Australia, LAC was seen as an important way of ensuring adequate attention was paid to individual children and of co-coordinating the fragmented service delivery system responsible for children in care (Clare, 2003; Dixon, 2001a).

Early criticism of the social work processes in LAC concerned both the planning methods and the extensive use of written text. Critics claimed that the standardisation of welfare intervention impeded communication between social workers and service users (Bell, 1998-09; Knight & Caveney, 1998; Lemay et al., 2006). They considered that procedures and preformatted questions obstructed child-sensitive professional practice (Bell 1998-99), because ‘standardisation … limits freedom to respond to the child’s wishes and opinions’ (Munro, 2001 p.15). They feared that the use of pro-formas would lead to the ‘emptying out of social work relationships’ (Garrett, 2003b p.19). Garrett (2003b) claimed that the social work relationship was particularly undermined by the
use of questionnaires and scales. These criticisms were augmented by the findings from implementation studies that there were practical difficulties in gaining compliance from social workers (Moyes, 1998). Documentation was seen to be disempowering for service users (Bell 1998-99; Knight & Caveney, 1998), and to threaten their privacy and confidentiality (Francis, 2002). Yeatman and Penglase (2004 p.6) claimed that the effectiveness of planning was unproven, with ‘next to no inquiry into when individualised planning facilitates good practice and client-centered services’. Further, some commentators questioned the possibility of effective planning, given the chaotic lives of the children and young people (Cooper & Webb, 1999). Other critics were concerned that governments were avoiding structural reform by shifting the focus from social structure to the individual, thus leading to the increased marginalisation of poor families (Garrett, 2003a; Knight & Caveney, 1998).

2.2.2.2 Debate over processes in the Assessment Framework and SCARF

Advocates of the Assessment Framework claimed that active planning and recording of data were central to attaining improved outcomes for children ‘in need’ in their own homes. The Assessment Framework was said to allow for greater collaboration between social workers and for the ongoing review of children (Cleaver & Walker, 2004; Horwath, 2002; Platt, 2001). The major evaluation of the implementation (Cleaver & Walker 2004) identified significant barriers to management’s introduction of the Assessment Framework, although researchers claimed an overall improvement in social workers’ recording of data and in interagency cooperation (Cleaver & Walker, 2004; Platt, 2001). The developers of SCARF identified significant problems with the Assessment Framework and aimed to address these.

In the United Kingdom, critical commentary of the Assessment Framework (Garrett, 2003b; Houston, 2002) followed a similar course to the response to LAC. Critics focused on the forms and their impact on social workers’ accountability to managers. The Assessment Framework was seen as expanding managers’ control over social workers through the introduction of performance targets, pressure for agency collaboration, a drive to child adoption, poor morale, the reorganisation of social work
education, a new regulatory environment, and public inquiries into child deaths (Garrett, 2003a). Garrett pointed particularly to case management’s link to the United Kingdom’s ‘Quality Protects’ program (a process of local authority accountability for the quality of welfare programs to children, which was linked to LAC-generated data). He claimed that the Assessment Framework was intended to restrict the amount of time workers spent with service users, describing it as having ‘a fixation with the time’ (Garrett, 2003b p.454).

The Australian evaluators of the Assessment Framework shared similar concerns about planning and recording (Tolley, 2005a), and SCARF’s developers aimed to overcome these problems (Fernandez & Romeo, 2003 p.50). SCARF was designed so that forms did not need to be completed early in the process of assessment, if this prevented social workers from building strong relationships with children and families. The forms were designed to reduce worker and service user resistance to documentation and to the directness of the questions. The authors aimed for forms that lessened the intimidation of service users:

*The tools, in some respects, contradicted the values; many clients couldn’t participate in it since they couldn’t understand the terms and language, and if they could, felt threatened by them* (Fernandez & Romeo, 2003 p.54).

There is no critique of the impact of the processes of SCARF in the Australian context. Garrett argues that his work has application to other countries (Garrett, 2003a p.3) but, as I argue later in this thesis, issues of government control of the social work profession and the family need to be understood in the Australian context (Tregeagle & Treleaven, 2006).

### 2.2.2.3 Service user studies of on the processes of LAC and SCARF

Within the social work literature, conflicting claims have been made about service users’ responses to the processes introduced through case management. Evaluation of LAC has focused on the nature of the planning and on service users’ ability to use the forms and record their views. Scottish reports indicated that the ‘Essential Information
Record’ was a useful way of collating data for young people, but noted that the forms’ bulk and format were seen as unattractive, confusing or boring. The nature of the personal information collected was an issue raised by a number of young people, who were concerned that it might be hurtful (Wheelaghan & Hill, 2000 pp.160-61). Privacy in relation to documentation was an early concern:

Assessment and Action Records consistently raised the deepest concerns for the young people. Primarily this was because the young people believe that some of the questions are very personal and, many feel, invasive of their privacy. The issue of confidentiality is a major concern for young people and they expressed worry that protocols are not in place to protect their confidentiality and that information is too widely disseminated about their lives (Francis, 2002 p.456).

An Australian study reported similar concerns: ‘children and young people had reservations about recording sensitive information about their lives on the Records, [although] they too reported benefits from completing the Records’ (Wise, 1999 p.1). This study claimed that language was intelligible for older participants but not for those who were younger or who had learning difficulties. Some children reported that they had been left to complete the forms alone and that this was difficult. Length and distribution of the forms were seen as problematic. Later studies of more established practice also reported reservations about the size, detail and formidable nature of the LAC forms, and concerns that the circulation of information to parents could hurt individuals and damage relationships (Kufelt et al., 2000).

Research into service users’ responses to the Assessment Framework reported service users’ reservations about the usefulness of plans: ‘parents were less certain of the efficacy of planning (than social workers)’ (Cleaver & Walker, 2004 p.247). Young people whose families had used the systems valued aspects of the processes and documentation, including ‘talking to people they thought important, and being provided with something to remind them of what was decided’ (Cleaver & Walker, 2004 p.248). These comments must however, be seen in light of the relatively low satisfaction with the plans: only nineteen of fifty parents were very positive about plans, although seven
were positive to an extent. Some parents were confused: ten did not think plans would help, and others were in conflict with social workers.

Australian research on parental satisfaction with SCARF processes reported positive accounts of relationships with social workers, although worker reliability was criticised (Fernandez, 2007a). That study also found that service users valued the openness and availability of social workers, but were frustrated at the slow resolution of problems.

### 2.2.3 Contested views of power relations in LAC and SCARF

A substantial area of debate over process in the social work literature concerned changes to power relations in case management that increased attempts both to create opportunities for service users to participate, and to reduce opportunities for social workers to act autonomously. These particular social work processes were critical as they led to informing social workers, potentially affected service users’ adherence to decisions, and restricted workers’ ability to alter care plans unilaterally. A range of claims were also made on behalf of service users by others.

The authors of LAC and SCARF saw attempts to increase service user power as central to the design of LAC and affecting outcomes for children and young people (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996; Tolley, 2005b). The LAC Reader addressed this issue at some length, describing LAC as an attempt to develop partnerships between social workers and service users in which power would be shared: ‘Partnership requires people to participate in joint work, and the style of participation must result in sharing of power’ (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.10). Whilst the term ‘partnership’ is generally used to imply an equality of power-sharing (Cleaver & Walker, 2002 p.59), the Reader was clear that LAC did not aim for equal power-sharing between social workers and service users. Instead, partnership was described in terms of social workers’ obligations to clarify issues of authority and power, to listen to service users, and to ensure that service users were informed of decisions. The reasons for employing participatory strategies were primarily described as organisational, that is, participation was meant to ensure that welfare programs had access to service users’ information: ‘Many of the questions can only be answered by social workers and carers working with birth parents and relatives’
While this quote specifies adult participation, the LAC forms in fact contained provisions for opportunities for children to participate in the intervention.

SCARF’s Australian developers also claimed that their system increased participation compared with previous practice in family support (Tolley, 2005a). There is little documentation on SCARF, however, which describes the level of power-sharing sought between service users and social workers. The authors claimed to use the same principles as LAC, and defined participation in terms of improving decision making: ‘Listening to and respecting the perspective of the children and family in terms of their histories and feelings about the future is essential to good outcomes’ (Tolley, 2005b). In contrast to LAC, children were specifically included in this reference to the participatory aims of SCARF.

Critics of LAC have not contested the concept of participation within these systems, nor explored the level of power-sharing, the motivations of the authors, or the decisions to exclude certain individuals from participatory strategies. Their main criticism is directed towards the role of written text in limiting participation:

> What the introduction of these [LAC] booklets perhaps represented was the eradication of the vestigial idea that the micro-dimension of engagement and interaction with children and young people should be non-directive and empathetic (Garrett, 2003a p.46).

Other critics have associated the imposition of managerial accountability on social workers with reductions in social workers’ time for engaging with family members (Searing, 2003), and with impeding children and young people from expressing their views: ‘[LAC] reduces the space for children to contribute to determining what is in their best interest and what outcomes they themselves want to achieve’ (Munro, 2001 p.134).

Some social workers were also concerned that LAC restricted the time available for practitioners and service users to interact, and that the repetitive, stigmatising and
intimidating nature of the documentation stifled participation, and contributed to situations in which service users lied or remained silent (Drolet & Sauve-Kobylecki, 2006). Garrett (2003a) criticised the system’s authors for not including young people in the design of LAC. Winter (2006), as described above, claimed that LAC was based on a concept of childhood that effectively restricted participation.

2.2.3.1 Studies of service users’ experiences of power relations between social workers and service users

Researchers on service users’ experiences of power relations reported contradictory findings. Some research studies identified increases in participation in LAC-based interventions. Two Scottish evaluation reports described greater participation than in the pre-case managed interventions (Francis, 2002; Wheelaghan & Hill, 2000). Young people were described as feeling ‘that they were more involved than formerly in developing their plans’ (Wheelaghan & Hill, 2000 p.161). In Canada, researchers who undertook qualitative research claimed that young people using LAC had significantly improved their participation compared with more traditional methods of compiling case information (Kufeldt et al., 2000 p.189). Young people considered that they had greater control over documentation and more regular communication with social workers (Kufeldt, McGilligan, Klein & Rideout, 2006).

In contrast, in Australia, Wise (1999) reported poor involvement of family members in interventions using LAC, with many young people not understanding the way they were meant to participate or the purpose of gathering information: ‘some adolescents … were mistrustful of the process, and were not especially frank about sensitive issues’ (Wise, 2003b p.15). CREATE (2004), the consumer group for young people in care, undertook a series of focus groups on young people’s care planning and viewed LAC as affecting engagement in care and placement planning. The report did not specify how many young people had experienced the system, the depth of their exposure or the length of

---

4 English studies, by Thomas (2005) and Thomas and O’Kane (1999) also reported that child welfare managers believed that young people were more involved in decision making than in previous practice.
involvement with LAC (a maximum of eighteen months was possible). Comments included:

LAC would be better *if always implemented correctly*... forms need to be more *kid friendly*... we need to be given a *better understanding*... the fact that we get a *copy is a start*... it’s *easy to understand, its[sic] informative*... it’s *really good* that the information about us goes with us (CREATE, 2004 p.10).

There has been little research attention paid to parents’ experiences of LAC.

Researchers have also investigated participation of service users using the Assessment Framework and SCARF. British evaluation of the Assessment Framework reported that parental participation had increased compared with previous practice (Cleaver & Walker, 2004). In Australia, Fernandez (2007a) found positive working relationships in SCARF-managed programs, and noted that families engaged more with social workers who used a collaborative approach. This study also indicated that children (aged nine to twelve years) who had experienced SCARF-based interventions had been consulted by their social workers and found the experience positive (Fernandez, 2007a p.20).

### 2.3 CONCLUSION

The introduction of LAC and SCARF in Australia followed a very different course from the government-sponsored system in the United Kingdom. In Australia, social workers, academics and non-government agencies introduced these systems, because of an interest in reform of individual interventions and the child welfare service system, relevant to the Australian context. This interest had resonance with ‘grassroots’ attempts at reform in Canada:

It is not easy to achieve a global impact on child welfare policy and legislation, particularly in Canada where 13 jurisdictions are involved, and where, because of historically rooted legislative frameworks, the federal government has no mandate to establish national standards (Kufeldt et al., 2005 p.306).
Of central interest to Australian advocates was the potential of LAC and SCARF to improve standards in interventions by linking social workers’ practice to an evidence-base, by addressing the problems of a highly fragmented service system, by ensuring the participation of service users, and finally by providing data on individuals and the functioning of the welfare system.

Since the implementation of these systems there have been significant pressures for change to LAC and the Assessment Framework. There has been growing interest in data collection and the use of ICT, which have led to further changes in the systems. Pressure to reduce participation is also evident in Australia—most noticeable in the exercise of power by social workers in the development of SCARF. Circumstances in different countries have significantly affected responses to case management.

In Australia, LAC has not been identified as a government project; in some jurisdictions, like New South Wales, its use has not been compulsory. This is in contrast to the United Kingdom, where the systems were strongly identified with the actions of central government and their attempts to ‘modernise’ social services (Garrett 2003a). In Australia, case management has been adopted by non-government agencies, mainly voluntarily, whereas in the United Kingdom there has been considerable resistance from social workers concerned about control of the profession and families.

The debate over case management has nevertheless polarised social workers. Kufeldt’s response to Garrett’s objections shows the continuing division:

In accusing the developers of the programme of promoting their own ideology, is he perhaps reflecting his own ideology? We wonder whether he has ever talked to the users, most particularly youth themselves (Kufeldt et al., 2005 p.310).

In considering the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF, developers of case management systems need to be cautious about the applicability of early implementation evaluation studies and overseas social work literature because of the substantial limitations of these studies and commentary. The ‘lived experiences’ of local service users may make a significant contribution to this stalemate.
Chapter 3
A theoretical framework to study ‘Looking After Children’ and ‘Supporting Children and Responding to Families’

Investigating service users’ experience of LAC and SCARF, the impact of technology in child welfare and how case management may develop requires a broad-based social theory. This chapter describes the social constructionist approach that I have employed to understand LAC and SCARF and to answer my individual research questions.

I use social constructionist theory to explore case management systems as particular ‘knowledge’ about child welfare, and to examine how change may occur. I draw on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, to understand the ‘knowledge’ underpinning LAC and SCARF, exploring these systems as ‘texts’ that embody ‘discourses’ of social work, management, child development and societal trends towards ‘democratisation’. The case management systems also significantly increase the use of written text, and to understand the impact of that, I draw on theories of Foucauldian linguist Norman Fairclough. I explore revision of Foucault’s theories to understand service users’ ‘subject positions’ on the discourses embodied in LAC and SCARF, and discern their ‘subjugated knowledge’. I use social constructionist theories of technology based on the concept of social shaping and affordances developed by Hutchby. To explore the implications of increased reliance on paper-based ‘technologies’, and the increasing use of ICT. I return to Foucault’s theories of power to understand the process of change in case management systems, and to analyse power relations in LAC and SCARF-based interventions. This theoretical position has implications for my own methodology and methods.
3.1 A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

Alvesson (2002 p.134) suggests that the choice of a theoretical position is, in part, the result of familiarity and ‘preference’. My own starting point is the recognition that ‘knowledge’ about child welfare has been clearly contested and politically charged—the subject of intense social negotiation. Certain Australian examples readily come to mind. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families, the treatment of children in institutions, and children’s ‘forced’ migration from England to Australia, are recent child welfare practices that are now widely seen as unacceptable (Australian Government Senate, 2004; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997; Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2001). Within the social constructionist paradigm, these examples show that child welfare knowledge is closely linked with history, culture and social processes, and that a critical stance is required in relation to knowledge claims about children’s welfare. The theories explored below are therefore based on the epistemological position of social constructionism:

The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practice, being constructed in and out of interaction with human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 2005 p.42).

One potentially fertile approach to understanding how knowledge is socially constructed is theory developed by Michel Foucault (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1972, 1977a, 1977b, 1980, 1983, 1990). Foucault approaches the question of knowledge through the idea of ‘discourse’. Key concepts in my approach to studying are that LAC and SCARF embody discourses, together with their constituent ‘statements’.

Discourses are shared social assumptions that define what is ‘sayable’ or known: they ‘constitute the objects of knowledge, social subjects and forms of “self”, social relationships, and conceptual frameworks’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.40). Discourses ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972 p.49). Although the word ‘discourse’ is used in a range of ways in the social sciences, Foucault uses it to refer to structured areas of knowledge. According to Foucault, therefore, discipline areas
such as ‘social work’ or ‘management’ are discourses. In Foucault’s view, discourses are shaped by institutional and cultural pressures and their own ‘rules’. They are perpetuated in practices such as commentary, academic discipline, refraction (that is, the limits individuals place on their own discourses), rituals and taboos. The discourses embodied in LAC and SCARF will affect how the ‘objects’ of child welfare, such as child abuse and neglect, are understood; how the relationships between workers and service users are formulated; and, how service users and social workers understand themselves.

Discourses are comprised of sets of ‘statements’, which are legitimate assertions that have an impact; they are authoritative claims to truth. Discourses form around objects of concern to a discipline, and a discourse must allow for the ‘transformation of objects’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.4). That is, discourses must allow for a variety of statements that name, categorise or explain the objects. Significantly, statements may contradict or complement one another. In this view, LAC and SCARF can be seen embodying multiple statements within multiple discourses. The authors of LAC and SCARF have negotiated statements in the social processes through which case management systems were developed, such as the meetings of academics and bureaucrats who designed LAC. These negotiations, and the way that statements are combined, have resulted in complex ‘texts’, which may be interpreted in a wide variety of ways.

In Foucault’s view, discourses are ‘maintained’ in relation to other discourses - a concept known as ‘inter-discursivity’. Any particular discourse must be understood in relation to the totality of discourses within an institution or society, and the relationships between them. As Foucault describes:

> The levels are not free from one another ... and are not deployed according to unlimited autonomy: between the primary differentiations of objects and the formation of discursive strategies there exists a whole hierarchy of relations (Foucault, 1972 p.81).

Such ‘orders of discourse’ are likely to change over time.
Discourses are unstable and subject to change, and much of Foucault’s work is concerned with identifying how discourses alter. His work initially focused on the ‘rules of formation’, which show that changes in discourses are significantly constrained by other contemporary or prior discourses, as well as non-discursive factors. Importantly, discourses are constitutive, ‘contributing to the production, transformation, and reproduction of the objects of social life’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.41). Change in a discourse may come about through those who may legitimately speak about it (such as academics); however, it is important to recognise that those who speak about a discourse are themselves subject to the discourse. Changes in discourses may also occur because of the relationship between statements constituting the discourse. Taking this view, change within an individual discourse may be seen as highly constrained, given its position in a network of discourses. A discourse may also change in response to changes in wider discourses, and through non-discursive factors. Foucault’s later work came to increasingly emphasise the role of power in discursive change (Olssen, 2006). Foucault identified power as fundamental to social processes in contemporary societies in which governing was not primarily based on repression. He described the imbricated relationship between power and knowledge. In this view, some discourses become dominant and others subjugated because of the operation of power.

In exploring LAC and SCARF, I will also draw on a development of Foucault’s concepts with the idea of ‘tendencies in discursive change affecting the societal order of discourse’ developed by Fairclough (1992 p.200). Two will be particularly important: democratisation and technologisation.

3.2 DEFINING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD WELFARE INTERVENTIONS

Using Foucault’s concept of discourses, LAC and SCARF can be seen as embodying a complex mix of statements from a number of discourses; their authors are ‘authoritative’ and ‘powerful’ in relation to the ‘consumers’ of the texts, such as service users. From a study of academic social work literature, written text and service users’ experiences, I will argue that LAC and SCARF embody statements from discourses of social work,
management and child development. LAC and SCARF are constituted by multiple statements from these discourses, which combine in ways that may contradict, or complement each other.

I argue that LAC and SCARF embody two significant tendencies in orders of discourse. The first is towards ‘technologisation’ and the second significant tendency is towards ‘democratisation’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.200) These two tendencies are explored in detail below. Fairclough also describes a third tendency in societal orders of discourse - the commodification of discourses, that is, a tendency for areas of interest not traditionally associated with production to be increasingly conceptualised as though they were commodities. Commodity is not critical to my understanding of LAC and SCARF, although it is important to acknowledge that both systems are products that are purchased and owned (as intellectual property), and this may affect their future development.

3.2.1 Social work discourse: statements of assistance and control

LAC and SCARF are expressions of statements constituting the discourse of social work. These statements concern the roles of the provision of assistance and the control of behaviour as means for promoting children’s welfare.

Statements of assistance and control have been combined in different ways since the origins of the social work profession in the nineteenth century (McDonald, 2006), and nowhere have they been more contested than in child welfare. Searing (2003) describes the history of child welfare as a movement from charitable provision focused on practical assistance, to a variety of approaches that emphasise control of behaviour. From the provision of charitable alms, social work was influenced by psychoanalytic techniques and focused on the development of insight through offering ‘a quasi parental’ guidance of behaviour. Subsequently, influenced by theories of Perlman (Searing,

---

5 Although the majority of child welfare workers in Australia are not trained social workers, nor eligible for membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers, the intellectual debate of child welfare practice is conducted within the discourse of social work, and workers have been referred to throughout this thesis as social workers.
2003), social workers shifted to a different ‘balance’ between of using both assistance and control, by helping service users with problem solving as well as focusing on service users’ social roles. The development of systems theory once again altered the combination of assistance and control (primarily influenced by the work of Hollis (Searing, 2003)). This approach led to an emphasis on resolving psychological difficulties and relieving environmental stress. By the 1960s, these approaches were challenged by theorists who criticised social workers as being too controlling. These critics aimed to increase assistance through changing social and economic structures. Despite this shift, caseworkers in child welfare have maintained an interest in control of behaviour, based on ‘compassion and caring, sometimes expressed in practical ways, as the most powerful motive for personal growth and change’ (Searing, 2003 p.312).

In the 1970s, concern over control in social work practice was reinforced by theorists drawing on the Foucauldian concept of ‘governmentality’ (Rose, 1999). Governmentality is an explanation of contemporary forms of regulating conduct through particular techniques and self-disciplining processes. In this view, child welfare had a critical place in the governing of modern societies because of the family’s central role in inculcating social responsibility (Donzelot, 1977). Child welfare was seen as part of a progression of growing concern with:

A whole range of technologies invested that would enable the family to do its public duty without destroying its private authority. Throughout the nineteenth century, a variety of ways were sought to medicalise the wealthy family, and to shape the domestic relations of the poor into the form of a private and moral family (Rose, 1999 p.74).

Families had been increasingly ‘responsibilised’ from the eighteenth century (Rose, 1999) and approaches to ‘governing’ the family were dominated by ‘consumptionism’ and ‘the psych technologies’ (such as psychiatry and psychology). Governmentality theorists postulated an increased focus on the role of the expert, an emphasis on self-realisation for wealthier families and a greater public policy focus on the urban
underclass (Rose, 1999). The poor family remained a significant focus in contemporary forms of governing, with social work practice central to the governing of the family.

Critics of both LAC and of SCARF’s precursor, the Assessment Framework, have strongly associated case management systems with governmentality. Both LAC and SCARF have been accused of imposing a particular view of ‘normality’ on families. Social workers have been warned to be alert:

*...to how a seemingly omniscient “objective” discourse on parenting standards can be used to regulate and discipline the socially and economically marginalised children and families that make up most of the service population (Garrett, 1999 p.33).*

Garrett warns that using LAC and the Assessment Framework makes child welfare practitioners:

*...complicit in the strategies of governance - part of the assemblage of micro-practices which comprise contemporary modes of government (Garrett, 2003a p.6).*

LAC and SCARF can be seen as a ‘new’ attempt to combine the dual aims of assistance and control. Chapter 5 explores how these statements are combined in LAC and SCARF, and the interpretation of this combination by service users.

### 3.2.2 Management discourse: statements of professionalism and managerialism

A second discourse that I argue is embodied in LAC and SCARF is that of management, concerned with the processes of administration and change in child welfare interventions. LAC and SCARF statements on management concern planning processes (such as time frames for information collection and decision making, review and interagency collaboration) and the recording of data.
Ife (1997) identifies four main statements in contemporary human service management that provide a useful framework for exploring management statements in LAC and SCARF. These are:

- **managerialism**—which promotes a top-down (hierarchical) approach in which accountability is to managers rather than service users;

- **professionalism**—which adheres to a hierarchical and humanist approach; it takes a top-down view with an emphasis on accountability to the profession, but also to the service user;

- **community**—which is committed to a bottom-up and humanistic approach and which stresses participation and democratic decision making; and

- **market**—which trusts in an anarchistic approach in which accountability is through customer or service user choice.

Academic commentators on child welfare have focused attention recently on the ongoing debate between statements on managerialism and professionalism (McDonald, 2006; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000), although community (discussed below in terms of increased democratisation) and market influences are also evident. Ife (1997) claims that there is an inherent tension between professionalism (presenting the aspirations of social workers) and managerialism.

Managerialism is seen to devalue social workers’ knowledge and skills, limit professional discretion, and shift accountability upwards and away from service users (Ife, 1997). Managerialism implies of portability of ‘knowledge’ (from professional practice) and stresses the importance of using transferable technical managerial skills to achieve efficient use of resources (Townley, 2002). Social workers have identified managerialism as a problem in both the United Kingdom (where case management was developed) and Australia. It has led to changes in the social work professional domain, to the erosion of boundaries around designated social work positions, to workplaces that
are not sympathetic towards professional values, and to loss of faith in professionals’ ability to manage social functions, such as child protection (McDonald, 2006). Parton describes the impact of managerialism in United Kingdom child welfare thus:

The predominant response to the changes and challenges since the early 1970s has been to construct ever more sophisticated systems of accountability, and thereby attempt to rationalise, standardise and “scientise” increasing areas of social work activity, with the introduction of ever more complex procedures and systems of audit and a narrow emphasis on evidence base (Parton, 2003 p.2).

Managerialism has had a strong influence in the United Kingdom (P. Foster & Wilding, 2000), and may be more strongly contested there than in Australia because the social work profession in the United Kingdom is central to the operation of the state (McDonald, Harris, & Wintersteen, 2003). Even so, a similar impact has been evident in Australia throughout the 1980s and 1990s:

The loss of status, seniority, autonomy and respect is most noticeable in public welfare within the large state bureaucracies ... but is evident to some degree in many other social work settings (Ife, 1997 p.17).

Given the growing influence of managerialism, professionalism has been increasingly challenged by society-wide concern at the power wielded by professionals:

The historically taken-for-granted assumptions about the professions fitted less easily with a more plural, less deferential, more educated and more critical society (Foster & Wilding, 2000 p.144).

This critique of professionalism in relation to child welfare has been particularly prominent in the United Kingdom, where there have been well-publicised deaths of children in out of home care, a strong political ‘New Right’, which has looked for ways to criticise professional power, and concern over the profession’s weak service ethic because of industrial action (Foster & Wilding, 2000; Garrett, 2003a). Professional competency has been attacked, as has been the knowledge base and professional ideology of social work. For example, assessment of families (Woodcock, 2003) has
been criticised on the grounds that social workers ‘operate within a narrow, historically determined range, focusing most heavily on emotional support and behavioural change’ (Broadhurst, 2003 p.343).

Over the last decade concern about the ability of welfare agencies to provide a professional service has been exacerbated by shortages of skilled labor. In the United Kingdom, welfare departments across the country have reported increasing problems in attracting staff (Harlow, 2004), and in London there is a 20% vacancy rate for children’s social workers (Social Care and Health Services Workforce Group, 2004). In Australia, there has been a similar concern about skill shortages (Meagher & Healy, 2003), exacerbated by the already limited number of tertiary-trained social workers.

Chapter 6 explores how approaches to managerialism and professionalism have been embodied in LAC and SCARF, and examines service users’ experiences of management discourse in case managed interventions.

3.2.3 Discourse about childhood: ‘developmentalism’ and ‘new children’s paradigm’

A third discourse that I argue is central to LAC and SCARF is that concerned with child development. Traditional developmentalist views of childhood have been challenged by a ‘new children’s paradigm’ over the past two decades (Prout & James, 1990). Both statements are evident in LAC and SCARF, where they are frequently contradictory.

Developmentalism has been challenged for viewing children in the following ways:

- as ‘becoming’ adults, thus emphasising future development rather than the present, with children’s wellbeing being seen mainly for its relevance for society’s future;
- as fused with the family, thus treating children, not as individual persons, but as part of a family;
- as a ‘universal’ category, and hence as lacking history, culture and socio-economic dimensions; and
• as unequal to adults, lacking competence and understanding; children’s knowledge is of less significance, and their voices are absent or less credible than adults (Mason, 2005).

In contrast, new children’s paradigm theorists identify the child as an individual and a maker of meaning. The new children’s paradigm recognises ‘the plurality of children’s experience and the narrow cultural focus of much of child development work’ (Greene, 1999 p.258). This ‘new’ view emphasises the child’s own phenomenal and subjective world and recognises the richness and plurality existing in children’s lives (Greene, 1999). As a result, the ‘whole child’ is of interest rather than aspects of their development. These theorists see children living in a culture of their own—not just as part of the adult culture around them. New children’s paradigm theorists view childhood as a highly diverse social phenomenon, separate from adults’ need to create social order (Corsario, 2005 p.18). The present time is of primary significance and socialisation is seen as ‘suppressing’ the child’s ‘present’ (Prout & James, 1990 p.29). Within this new paradigm, ‘age’ has become of lesser significance. Lee (2001p.137) claims:

Time, understood in chronological age, is the backbone along which the dominant framework arranges all other forms of human variation that it recognises, such as rational-irrational, cultural-natural and competent-incompetent.

Some commentators have identified the use of age bands as a technique for reinforcing social ‘stability’ (Einsenstadt cited in Prout & James, 1990).

I argue in Chapters 5–7 that LAC and SCARF draw on conflicting statements about childhood, and I explore service users’ experiences of concepts of childhood when using LAC and SCARF. Chapter 5 examines the goals established for childhood development, and Chapter 6 the understandings of competencies as being age-related. In Chapter 7, I examine the ways in which children are excluded from participatory strategies when they live with their parents, or of a certain age (in this case below eight or over eighteen years of age).
3.2.4  Tendency to democratisation

In addition to the discourses described above, LAC and SCARF reflect changes in wider societal orders of discourse. One central tendency, identified by Fairclough (1992), is that of democratisation, which entails a move away from inequalities and asymmetries in prestige within and among groups of people. I argue that the authors of LAC and SCARF have made use of written text to alter power relations, through increasing service users’ opportunities to exercise power and reducing such opportunities for social workers.

The participation of service users in interventions has been a prominent theme in child welfare since the 1970s, both in the United Kingdom (Sinclair, 2004) and in Australia (Healy, 1998). Service users’ participation has been linked with wider social changes, including the growth of consumerism and a confluence of interests from both the political ‘right’ (interested in service users’ responsibilities) and the ‘left’ (interested in human rights) (Healy, 1998). Increased service users’ participation is seen to be consistent both with managerialism (concerned with accountability), and with social work professional interest (concerned with client self-determination). Cloke and Davies (1995) draw parallels between concerns about service users’ participation and moves towards more openness and accountability on the part of public-service agencies. Sinclair (2004 p.107) points to a number of policy concerns leading to children’s participation:

Three are particularly important: the growing influence of the consumer; the children’s rights agenda; and new paradigms within social science that have increased our understanding of the child as a competent social actor.

Participatory practices have been formalised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in child welfare legislation in England (Children Act 1989) and in all Australian States and Territories (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005).

In exploring participation in LAC and SCARF, three sets of statements are important to this study: the level of power-sharing, the motivation for participation, and the inclusion or exclusion of particular individuals from participatory strategies. Power-sharing and
the level of change in the exercise of power has been the subject of considerable theoretical interest: the most well-known model is that of Arnstein (1969), which was developed in relation to social planning, and adapted in the area of children’s participation initially by Hart (1992) and later by Shier (2001). These models differentiate hierarchies of power-sharing, ranging from tokenism (in which service users hold no effective power), through to a fuller sharing of power such as occurs in collaborative decision making (Shier, 2001).

In relation to motivations for adopting participatory practices, theorists draw attention to a range of objectives, including:

- encouraging personal, social and academic development;

- promoting citizenship and social inclusion;

- helping achieve organisational goals (for example, to enhance relevance and efficiency of interventions); and

- complying with wider public policy objectives (Evans & Spicer, 2008).

Sinclair (2004) applies distinctions like these to children’s participation. She identifies a range of motivations such as upholding children’s rights, fulfilling legal responsibilities, improving interventions or decision making, enhancing democratic processes, promoting child protection, increasing children’s skills, and empowering children and enhancing their self-esteem.

The third set of statements relates to the often ‘hidden’ assumptions that prescribe who is included in participation strategies, and implicitly, who is excluded. For example, in LAC and SCARF, children under a certain age are excluded from participation (because of the age at which children are included), as are some family members.

Participation is generally uncontested in the literature on LAC and SCARF and in social work practice (Healy, 1998 is a notable exception). Research indicates that there are a
wide variety of approaches to participation in actual practice. There appears to be considerable resistance to service users’ participation both by social work practitioners and by managers (Leung, 2008). This is shown in recent studies of participatory strategies in child welfare (Beckett, McKeigue & Taylor, 2007; Leeson, 2007; Sinclair, 2004). Furthermore, resistance to participation has been described as particularly strong in relation to children, because of:

A paternalistic consensus in our society which centers on assumptions that all children are incapable of reaching rational decisions and exercising political power (Frost & Stein, 1989p.132).

Other theorists have noted that there is an incongruity between social workers’ views of the child as dependent and yet as having agency (Mason & Michaux, 2005), and a disjunction between participation and social work theory based on psychodynamic and ‘ecological’ theories (Tilbury, Osmond, Wilson, & Clark, 2007). Researchers have also documented that social workers vary widely in their views about the age that participatory practices should be used with children (Shemmings, 2000). These practice studies provide reinforcement for Ife’s (1997) view that professionalism may be at odds with community approaches to human service delivery as described above.

Chapter 7 explores how LAC and SCARF reflect these changes and service users’ lived experiences of power relations. While the authors of LAC and SCARF aimed to alter power relations (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996), the range of motivations, the levels of power-sharing sought, and the definition of who is included were very variable. Furthermore, the impact of other discourses (such as that of management) and changes in orders of discourse (such as technologisation) also affect attempts to achieve greater democratisation.

3.2.5 Reflections on these discourses in contemporary theory
The discourses and tendencies described above have been central to contemporary approaches to child welfare practice in Australia, and have shaped current theoretical debate on permanency planning, evidence-based practice, individualised case
management, and service co-ordination. Each of these approaches is contested in the
debate on LAC and SCARF.

‗Permanency planning‘ has been important in child welfare since the 1980s (Barnardos
Australia, 1996). Permanency planning theory aims to prevent placement, reduce
placement disruption and to achieve stability and continuity for children through pro-
active planning. It focuses on:

Time-limited, goal directed work with families which aims to help children live
with nurturing adults who offer continuity and the opportunity for lifetime
relationships (Maluccio, Fein & Olmstead, 1986 p.84).

In Australia, permanency planning has been influential because of the problem of ‘drift’
in the welfare system, pressures on the out-of-home care and child protection systems,
the reduction in the numbers of carers, and the impact of substance abuse among parents
that reduces the likelihood of restoration of children to their family (Cashmore, 2000).
Permanency planning has been criticised in social work theory because it has been
strongly identified with managerialism, and this debate is mirrored in arguments about
LAC’s and SCARF’s timetables, and doubts about the very possibility of planning in the
chaotic lives of the children using welfare programs (Cooper & Webb, 1999).
Nonetheless, permanency planning has also been identified with professionalism in its
emphasis on preventing children’s entry to welfare care, on requirement for review of
decisions, on the importance of identifying goals, and on time-limited interventions.

‘Evidence-based’ practice has also been an issue of considerable importance in social
workers’ approaches to identifying the knowledge-base for the nature for assessment
and the processes used to achieve change in children’s wellbeing. Some commentary on
the evidence-based practice ‘movement’ sees this approach as part of a long professional
tradition of incorporating the findings of research (McDonald, 2006). Universities have
developed institutes to promote the use of evidence, and international attention has
focused on building evidence resources such as Campbell Collaboration (Cheers 2006).
Evidence-based practice has also been criticised as predominantly managerial, because
it tends to erode professional discretion and to objectify the knowledge-base of social
workers. Critics of evidence-based practice claim that it fails to capture accurately the ways in which professionals operate and demonstrate their knowledge in practice (Parton & O’Byrne, 2000). Nonetheless, the authors of LAC and SCARF have actively advocated an evidence-base for case management (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996). In addition, advocates claim that LAC and SCARF themselves contribute to the social work evidence-base, since they potentially constitute sources of data on which evidence for practice may be founded.

Individualised case management has also been part a significant trend in planning for human service provision over the past decade (Yeatman & Penglase, 2004). It is defined as assessing and formulating plans, enabling service user–agency contact, an individualised service network, monitoring and evaluation of case plans (McCallum, 2002). Yeatman and Penglase (unpublished, 2007 p.6) have attributed the interest in individualised case management in child welfare to changes in concepts of childhood and democratisation in which:

Children and young people, now, rhetorically at least, are accepted as persons to whom contemporary standards of human rights as well as contemporary standards of inclusion in participation should apply.

Individualised case management has also been strongly linked, however, to managerial concern with goal-setting and monitoring, with critics claiming that it diverts attention from structural reform of the social problems facing vulnerable children (Garrett, 2003a).

The planning of co-ordination and collaboration of the services that work with children has also been a significant theme in child welfare services. In Australia, social workers have identified difficulties with interagency partnerships as a significant problem in service delivery (Campbell, 2002; Rawsthorne & Eardley, 2004; Scharpel, 2004; Scott, 2005). Critics, however, have also identified this as a managerial concern—part of a wider policy initiative that uses the focus on partnerships as an attempt to cut back on public spending (Percy-Smith, 2005). Other critics see collaboration as an imposition, arguing that overcoming poor interagency co-ordination cannot be done using
managerial approaches, but rather, professional communication should resolve the problems of co-ordination (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Attempts at co-ordination and allocation of agency responsibility are strongly evident in LAC and SCARF.

A further focus in management more recent interest in internal co-ordination of agencies. Yeatman and Penglase (2007 p.17) have identified this as an important theme:

LAC, then, works with the reality of what is a fact of life for most children in out of home care, particularly children who remain in care over a considerable period of time: that they are unlikely to have only one caseworker in that period, and likely indeed to have several, as well as several people involved in their lives at any one time (Yeatman & Penglase, 2007 p.17).

Addressing the problem of internal co-ordination has been a strong selling-point by the advocates of LAC and SCARF (Jones, 2006). This issue is likely to be associated with managerialism but has not been discussed by critics of LAC or SCARF.

LAC and SCARF can be seen as a ‘new’ attempt to combine a variety of statements and discourses from social work, management, childhood and democratisation. The debate over case management thus reflects broader debates in child welfare. However, LAC and SCARF introduce a further change consistent with change in societal orders of discourse in the wider community.

3.3 CASE MANAGEMENT AS TECHNOLOGISATION

I argue that LAC and SCARF embody in child welfare a tendency in societal orders of discourse described by Fairclough as ‘technologisation’. By technologisation is meant the conscious use of ‘discourse technologies’ (such as interviewing, teaching, counselling and to this list I would add case management), to bring about social change (Fairclough, 1992 p.215). Fairclough sees this tendency to technologisation as the exploitation of post-modern understandings of the close connection between language and power. Technologisation should not be confused with the use of technology such as
machines or computers- rather it is the use of the ‘technology’ of spoken and written text.

In this view, LAC and SCARF can be seen as typical of:

...transcontextual techniques, which are seen as resources or toolkits that can be used to pursue a wide variety of strategies in many diverse contexts ... increasingly to be handled in specific institutional locations by designated social agents. They are coming to have their own specialist technologists: researchers who look at their efficiency, designers who work out refinements ... and trainers who pass on techniques (Fairclough, 1992 p. 215).

Such an approach is consistent with social constructionism, which views language at the centre of the construction of knowledge. The ‘linguistic turn’ in social theory has generally led to greater recognition of language in social processes (Alvesson, 2002). Text is increasingly appreciated as an important part of social practices and power relations:

The ruling relations are essentially text-mediated and it is in text ... that [they] provide for their capacity to exist beyond particular times, places and people’s doings (Smith, 2001 p.164).

In Fairclough’s view (1992), technologisation is possible because both written and spoken texts are in a dialectic relationship with social practices; they are both formed by and shape social practices. Texts are: ‘elements of concrete social events, which are both shaped by and shape more abstract and durable social structures and practices’ (Fairclough, 2003 p.16). Fairclough (1992, p.216) claims that conscious attempts at change in social practices may be achieved through many aspects of text:

Designed and refined on the basis of anticipated effects of even the finest details of linguistic choices in vocabulary, grammar, intonation, organisation of dialogue and so forth.
Fairclough’s analysis of the relationship of texts, discursive practices and social practices are detailed in the following chapter, where they form the basis of a method to analyse discourses.

It must be noted that when Fairclough (1992 p.4) writes of texts, he is referring to both spoken and written texts; however, I argue that the defining feature of case management is the shift from spoken interactions to a greater reliance on written text. The authors of LAC and SCARF have specifically used the properties of written text through changing ‘genre’ (that is, ways of acting in its discursive aspect, for example, a genre of an interview would be a job interview), through ‘intertextual’ associations (the way that a text draws on contemporary or historically prior texts), and by altering the production, distribution and consumption of the texts.

One of the most significant features of case management systems is the heavy reliance on written text and the conscious exploitation of the properties of text in attempting to change social processes. This use of written text is the unique aspect of case management systems, notwithstanding that use of forms, files and recording are a fundamental aspect of social work practice (Steyaert 1997), and their production is virtually taken for granted in child welfare. Recording in social work has been identified as poor in Australia (Cumming et al., 2007) and United Kingdom (Foster et al., 2008) ‘leading to flawed decision making (Taylor, 2008 p.29). Children frequently having poor knowledge of their past as a result (Community Services Commission, 2000). Pen, paper and filing are ‘technologies’ which, although not generally thought of in this way, need to be considered as such to understand the child welfare intervention.

Technologisation has resulted in two distinctive features of case management systems. Firstly, the authors of these systems have attempted to introduce a ‘third’ party, the ‘external expert’, into the relationship between social worker and service user. The written forms used by LAC and SCARF introduce uniformity of professional knowledge, through shared language and values, to standardise approaches to social work practice. The written texts are attempts to limit professional discretion exercised
by individual social workers and are legitimated through claims of an evidence-base (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996). This strategy is made clear in claims of the authors of LAC:

We have produced an assessment and action record that is designed to have direct influence over practice ... specify objectives derived from research on child development and child care practice, and link them to actions which have been shown to be necessary for their achievement (Parker et al., 1991 p.12).

The second distinctive feature of the increased role of written text is the emphasis on recording on the LAC and SCARF forms. Not all case management systems attempt to impose recording, for example the New Zealand ‘Care and Protection Practice Framework’ (Connelley, 2005) attempts to prescribe practice, but does not rely on written records. In contrast, LAC and SCARF aim for extensive recording. This has significant implications for power relations between service users and social workers, for example the recording and signing of forms limits the autonomy of workers.

There are other consequences. Parton (2008 p260), argues that the increased emphasis on recording has had other profound impacts on social workers:

> Increasingly, it seems that the key focus of activity of social work ... is concerned with gathering, sharing and monitoring information ... this growing concern with information might be transforming the form of knowledge in social work and the nature of “social” work itself.

Parton claims that increased interest in data has refocused practice from explanations of behaviour to a concern with ‘actions’. He describes a growing reduction in discretionary decision making and the increased centrality of managers to the extent that: ‘The emphasis on relationship, once the central focus of social work practice, was thereby stripped of its social, cultural and professional significance’ (Parton, 2008 p.260).

Three further significant implications of written text important to this study are that it allows:
for recording of information that creates the possibility of systematic data collation. This has been recognised in the United Kingdom (Davies, 1998; Jackson & Kilroe, 1996; Kerslake, 1998; Moyes, 1998) and Australia (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006; Wise, 2003c).

for the possibility of the packaging and sale of social work knowledge. In Australia, both LAC and SCARF are owned and sold, albeit on a not-for-profit basis. This may have implications for the future development of systems, as it may increase the influence of purchasers.

for increasing use of technology in child welfare, not only reliance on pen and paper, but the possibility of using ICT.

Service users’ experiences of the use of written text are explored in Chapter 6. It is a significant issue in their participation in interventions.

3.4 UNDERSTANDING SERVICE USERS’ EXPERIENCES

In this chapter, I have so far considered my understanding of LAC and SCARF as embodying discourses of social work, management, childhood, democratization and technologisation. I now turn to the theoretical basis for answering my research questions. To answer my first question on the experiences of service users I consider a Foucauldian approach to understanding service users’ relationship to the discourses. I introduce the idea of power/knowledge considering Foucault’s understanding of how some discourses dominate and become knowledge, and others become subjugated.

3.4.1 Service users relationship to discourses

As outlined in Chapter 1, when using a Foucaudian approach, service users’ experiences are significant in the development of LAC and SCARF. But how can individuals’ views of discourses be understood? To address this question, I draw on Foucault’s concepts of ‘subjugated’ and ‘dominant’ discourse, ‘subject positions’, ‘subjectification’ and ‘members’ resources’. However, I have concerns about aspects of his theory and also draw on revisions of Foucault’s theory by linguists and feminists. I argue that service
users hold a range of ‘subject positions’ on discourses, and that individuals bring particular ‘members’ resources’ to interpreting discourses. Sometimes their knowledge may be ‘subjugated’.

For Foucault, discourses constitute the individual and are most successful when they do not encounter ‘resistance’, but directly shape the way people understand both the world and themselves. Their power is ‘only tolerable on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms’ (cited by Fairclough, 1992 p.50). In this view, the individual is a ‘site’ where power is enacted, and the ‘self’ is formed through discourses. Thus dominant discourses form people’s subjectivities, or senses of selfhood, and shape individuals’ views of themselves and the world (Wang, 1999).

Foucault’s view of the formative effect of discourses on the individual does not adequately allow for understanding the different positions taken by individuals and the potential for discursive change. Foucault's view has been increasingly re-developed by theorists, particularly feminists (Mills, 2004), who have argued that his view of subjectification does not adequately explain resistance or the diversity of individuals’ views (Smith, 1987). Feminists have consequently revised Foucault’s idea of subjectification, seeing it as too passive and too little aware of the role of individual ‘agency’. This revision sees individuals as active in positioning themselves in relation to discourses:

Discourse [is seen] less as something to which one is subjected than as a vehicle which is used by subjects to work out interpersonal relationships, complying with certain elements and actively opposing others (Mills, 2004 p.76).

These feminists regard the individual as both holding a range of subject positions and capable of resistance. Individuals may also change in relation to a discourse:

The process of finding a position for oneself within discourse is never fully achieved, but is rather one of constantly evaluating and considering one’s
position and, inevitably, constantly shifting one’s perception of one’s position and the wider discourse as a whole (Mills, 2004 p.87).

Individuals may be caught in discrepancies between conflicting discourses; there may be ambiguities and anomalies in their accounts of themselves or they may resist the discourse. Furthermore, discourses may not be adopted uniformly by individuals, and the individual’s positioning may depend on context. Feminist revision of Foucault’s view of subjectification has led to the development of research methods that assist in exploring the experiences of the less powerful and that offer an understanding of subjugated discourses (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1987, 200). These techniques have influenced the methods of this research.

Considering individuals’ subject positions also raises the issue of what resources individuals bring to understanding discourse. Fairclough (1992 p, 60) claims that Foucault’s concept of the constituting effect of discourse on the self ‘(ignores) the fact that (discourses) inevitably take place within a constituted, material reality, with reconstituted “objects” and reconstituted “social subjects”’. In Fairclough’s view, discourses are interpreted differently by individuals who bring their own ‘members’ resources’ to interpretation. Fairclough (1992 p.80) defines members’ resources as:

Effectively internalised social structures, norms and conventions, including orders of discourse, and conventions for the production, distribution and consumption of texts ... which have been constituted through past practice and struggle (Fairclough, 1992 p.80)

The concept of members’ resources is being increasingly considered in social work in relation into child welfare (Howath, 2008) and in other areas of practice (M. Foster, Harris, Jackson, & Glendinning, 2008).

The concept of ‘subjugated discourse’ is also central to my approach to understanding service users’ experiences of case management systems. Despite the apparent dominance of some discourses, in Foucault’s view, discourses rarely become totally dominant and are better understood as unstable and struggling to dominate. They may be
contested and interpreted, and may vary in form from context to context. Discourses are constantly negotiated, and within this negotiation, some discourses become lost or subjugated. ‘Subjugated knowledge’ is defined by Foucault (cited in Gordon, 1980 p.82) as:

Whole sets of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborate, naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientficity.

Subjugated knowledge is the preserve of less powerful people: Foucault describes this knowledge as ‘these unqualified, or even directly disqualified knowledges (such as that of the psychiatric patient … or the delinquent etc)’ (Foucault in Gordon, 1980 p.82), I will argue that service users’ knowledge has become subjugated in the development of case management systems.

In exploring service users’ experiences of LAC and SCARF, I will attempt to discover the subject position of individuals both within particular statements and within combinations of statements, their individual differences and their subjugated knowledge of what could assist them in child welfare interventions.

3.4.2 The implications of Foucault’s view of power for the methodology of this study

Using Foucault’s view of dominant and subjugated discourses and the imbrication of power/knowledge has two significant implications for the methods used this study. Firstly, I will apply Foucault’s radical reconceptualisation of power (Foucault, 1977a, 1990) in considering LAC’s & SCARF’s authors’ attempts to alter the power relations in child welfare interventions. Secondly, I will incorporate the understanding of the imbrication of power and knowledge into my own attempt to develop knowledge and consider its implications for the methodology of my study.

In Foucault’s view, power is not only repressive, it is also productive, exercised rather than possessed and arising from the bottom up, rather than emanating from a central source (Sawicki cited in Olssen, 2006 p.10). Traditionally, power has been
conceptualised as something held by or bestowed from a higher authority, and as a necessity to sustain the existence of the state: from feudalism, to royal power and to parliamentary democracy. Foucault’s alternative view sees power as a type of network ‘it exists only in action’ (Foucault, 1980 p.89). Power is thus ubiquitous, flowing not from top to bottom, but arising from the bottom in multiple power relationships:

*Power is not something acquired, seized, shared ... Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations ... Power comes from below ... power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective ... Where there is power there is resistance* (Foucault, 1990 p.94-95).

In Foucault’s view, power is responsible for the development of meaning, change and relationship. People submit to power because they gain in negotiations: ‘it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse’ (Foucault 1980 p.119 cited in Healy 1998). This perspective has significant implications for the way that the authors of LAC and SCARF have approached power. They have attempted to use texts and discursive practices both to bestow and to curb power.

The second impact of power/knowledge affects my own efforts to generate ‘knowledge’. Chapter 4 focuses on the potential operation of power to subjugate service users’ voices in the research setting, and the significance of attempts to open up opportunities for the exercise of power.

**3.5 UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY IN CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE**

The second research question of this study concerns how recent developments in ICT could contribute to the welfare of children. To address this question, I use a social constructionist theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between technology and social practices, in this case, child welfare interventions. This is an area where I draw on theorists other than Foucault, because this was not an area that he considered in detail.
The theoretical position that I adopt regards technology as both shaped by, as well as shaping, social processes (Hutchby, 2001, 2003). I will argue that pen and paper represent a form of technology that has been shaped by social processes, and that brings possibilities and limitations to communication in welfare interventions. Any shift to ICT will itself be socially shaped, and bring different possibilities and new limitations to child welfare interventions.

### 3.5.1 Technology as shaped by and shaping social processes

The role of technology in social practices has been the subject of extensive theoretical debate. At one extreme, statements made by ‘essentialist’ theorists claim that technologies lead social change and that such change is inevitable and positive: ‘techno-determinism coupled with a utopian vision of a techno-future’ (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 2001 p.4). At the other theoretical extreme, social constructionists view technologies as the result of social processes (Hutchby, 2001; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1993). At its most radical, social constructionism claims that technology has no inherent properties outside interpretation, with some theorists viewing technologies simply as texts into which meaning is ‘written’ by their inventors and ‘read’ or interpreted by their users (Hutchby, 2001).

The view that I adopt assumes that technology is both the result of, but also shapes social processes. Factors that shape technology include socio-economic circumstances, gender, literacy, age and power, as well as other technologies (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1993). This position however, is not adequate to explain the effect of technology. The approach that I therefore adopt is that technologies also have effects on social practices by virtue of their inherent properties. I draw on Hutchby’s view (2001, 2003), that:

> Technologies can be understood as artifacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices of human use, in interaction with, around and through them (Hutchby, 2001 p.444).

How do technologies affect social processes? Hutchby uses the concept of ‘affordance’ describes the ways that technologies may affect social processes – this involves the assumption that that some element of the technology is non-discursive. Affordances are:
‘functional and relational aspects that frame, while not determining, the possibilities of agentic [sic] action in relation to the technology’ (Hutchby, 2001 p.444). That is, affordances are the ways that technology can be used and the features that constrain or limit a technology’s use.

Hutchby (2001 p.447) proposes that affordances have particular characteristics, and these are important to considering any greater use of ICT in child welfare case management:

- affordances may be different for different people. Technology may be ‘read’ in different ways by different individuals. For example, computers may be sources of entertainment for children, access to employment for adults, or communication tools between social workers.

- affordances may not be derived from the technology itself, but may be the result of different contexts. For example, the internet’s origins may be in scientific research but it is now widely used for social contact.

- a particular technology may offer a range of affordances, that is, it may prove to have a number of uses, and these may be linked to complex sets of concepts and conventions. Thus, while we speak of ‘Information and Communication Technologies’, a computer could be used primarily for the generation of data, or alternately, primarily for ‘communication’, with the use of the internet and e-mail.

- affordances offered by a particular piece of technology may not have been ‘designed into’ the technology and it may be used in ways that were not foreseeable. From this perspective, technologies may have unintended consequences. For example, the original scientific development of the internet may not have been envisaged as the vehicle for pedophile activity.

When considering the impact of technology on the use of LAC and SCARF, it is essential to consider the social processes affecting both service users and workers. It is also necessary to consider the impact of these technologies on different social groups.
3.5.2 The relevance of theory of technology to my research question

The view of technology explored above has implications for understanding the pen and paper technology currently used with service users in conjunction with LAC and SCARF, as well as the increasing application of ICT to case management. In considering the changes in communication moving from one technology to another, I explore the possibilities and limitations of different technologies in relation to Fairclough’s (1992) concern with ‘production’, ‘distribution’ and ‘consumption’ (or interpretation) of texts. I will focus on the impact that these processes have on the relationship between text and social practices. This issue is explored in Chapter 8.

In using Fairclough’s theories, it is important to point out Fairclough himself does not apply his conceptual framework in this way. Fairclough considered technology briefly in his 2003 publication in which he described new technology as bringing change to texts by mediating communication in both one-way (such as internet access) and two-way (such as email) communication. He claimed that ICT inevitably entail a change in genre: ‘the development of new communication technologies goes along with the development of new genres’ (Fairclough, 2003 p.77). He also identified ICT as allowing non-sequential communication in that it offers individuals choices in the order or paths that they can take in navigating texts. I use Fairclough’s broader concept of discursive practices, however, to shed light on the impact of ICT on social practices. Used in conjunction with Hutchby’s concept of ‘affordances’, I attempt to understand the possibilities and limitations of ICT in relation to changes brought about in the production, distribution and consumption of texts.

3.6 APPLYING FINDINGS TO REDEVELOP LAC AND SCARF

The third and final research question of this study concerns how the findings on service users’ experiences of case management and ICT could inform the development of LAC and SCARF. Given my theoretical approach, any changes to case management must be explained in terms of changes to discourses. I therefore focus on Foucault’s (1972) concept of discursive change: using both his early work, especially the concept of ‘rules of formation’ of discourses, and his later work, which came to identify the importance of
power in social change (Foucault, 1990). Both perspectives contribute to my analysis of how LAC and SCARF may be developed.

Foucault was initially concerned with the rules governing how particular statements come to belong to a discourse. ‘Rules of formation’ of the ‘objects’ of knowledge of a discourse (for example, child abuse as an object of social work discourse), concern how they can be spoken about and by who, and how concepts and strategies are formed. Those who speak about discourses are themselves affected by the discourse, and ‘speak’ at particular times and places, and from their subject positions. ‘Rules of formation’ relate to other contemporary or prior discourses as well as non-discursive factors. In considering the rules of formation in child welfare, which have implications for the development of LAC and SCARF, I will explore change in the orders of discourse affecting child welfare case management, identify those who can speak about this, the potential for shifts in concepts, the relationship of different discourses (such as their complementarities or conflicts), and changes to non-discursive elements, including changes in ICT.

Foucault’s later work focused increasingly on the central role of power in relation to change. His analysis of governing in modern society led to an increasing awareness of the ubiquity of power in day-to-day matters. In this view, power and knowledge were inseparably enmeshed; it was not possible to have power without knowledge, nor knowledge without power. The relationship between knowledge and power is however, complex:

*When I read ... “knowledge is power” or “power is knowledge” I begin to laugh, since studying their relation is precisely my problem. If they were identical, I would not have had to study them and I would be spared a lot of fatigue (Foucault, 1990 p.195-211).*

To contribute to understanding the role of power/knowledge in LAC and SCARF, I have attempted to identify the subject positions of service users and others, significant in child welfare, such as workers. Individuals will have rich and diverse positioning, but groupings of individuals can have common subject positions on some statements.
Significant groupings in this context include: foster carers, social workers, social work managers (including non-government and government managers, administrators and government bureaucrats), academic social workers and researchers. Wider social interests are also involved, such as social concern about the control of families and public interest in parents’ behaviour towards children.

Foucault’s view that discourses are inherently unstable is relevant to any consideration of how change occurs. Foucault (1990 p.10) believed that discourses were open to change because their dominance is limited:

We must make an allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

This instability is particularly relevant to the development of LAC and SCARF, because of the complexity of discourses and statements embodied in the written text. Discourses may also change as the result of conscious interventions in the process of change. Some advocates have used discourse theory as the basis of their strategies for change, employing it as a tool with which to consciously unsettle power relations (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994).

3.7 CONCLUSION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THIS STUDY

The final section of this chapter draws together the theoretical framework and foreshadows the methodology used to explore service users’ experiences of LAC and SCARF. This chapter has described LAC and SCARF as a complex mix of discourses and statements: sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting. Critical to my methodology is an analysis of the discourses in LAC and SCARF, and their constituent statements.
In approaching my first research question on service users’ experiences of LAC and SCARF, I have drawn on Foucauldian theory to highlight the importance of studying power through the lived, local experience of those on the periphery of power. An examination of service users’ experiences of LAC and SCARF required an understanding of service users’ subject positions in relation to each of the multiple statements embodied in LAC and SCARF, as well as their combination. It also required identification of service users’ subjugated knowledge, and the use of methodology that could identify which discourses are dominant and which are subjugated, and to identify subjectification. I also needed to limit my own subjectification and power in the identification of discourses. This is explored in the following chapter.

In approaching my second research question of how recent changes to ICT could affect children’s welfare, I employed social constructionist theories of technology. I drew on literature from a range of disciplines in the currently inchoate discourse of ICT. I used interviews with service users to explore the social factors that may affect their use of both pen and paper technologies and ICT. I then explored the limitations of these technologies, and the possibilities that they offer in relation to the production, distribution and consumption of text, and the impact that they may have on child welfare.

In considering my third research question- how the findings of my study may inform future development of LAC and SCARF - I returned to Foucault’s theories of change: identifying how the ‘rules of formation’ and power/knowledge operate in child welfare case management. I drew on understandings of the ‘subject positions’ of service users and social workers on these statements identified through the texts.

Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge has implications for my own attempts to generate knowledge about case management: both for the methods used, and analysis undertaken. This theory is also important to my analysis in Chapter 7 of attempts by the authors of LAC and SCARF to consciously alter power relations. The following chapter will explore the methodology and methods used in the study based on these theories.
Chapter 4
Methodology and methods of this study

This chapter describes the strategies arising from my theoretical framework (methodology) and the concrete techniques or methods, that I have used in this study (Crotty, 2005). In this chapter, I explain my use of a qualitative approach, namely, analysing discourse through texts: the academic social work literature, the LAC and SCARF forms, and semi-structured interviews with service users.

4.1 OVERVIEW

4.1.1 Qualitative approach

Consistent with a social constructionist epistemology, I have used a qualitative approach (Alvesson, 2002). Such an approach was the only way to explore meaning, especially to allow space for identification of service users’ positioning and subjugated knowledge, and to monitor change. Qualitative methods allowed opportunities for nuances to be examined, and was consistent with my aim to understand the wide variety of service users’ positions, including any ambiguities, ambivalences and changing views, and the operation of power and resistance. As an approach, it was also less dependent on my own prior knowledge. Qualitative research also permitted the exploration of the constraints and richness of everyday life:

Qualitative researchers are more likely to confront and come up against the constraints of the everyday world. They see their world in action and embed their findings in it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p.16).

A qualitative approach is more suited to my requirements, than constrained and inferential quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).
4.1.2 Discourse analysis through text

My methodology has been based on the theories of Michel Foucault, described in the previous chapter. Foucault’s own method of historic analysis, however, is not appropriate for this study, which is focused on identifying subject positions rather than exploring changes in discourses over time. I have focused on analysing the discourses embodied in LAC and SCARF by drawing on the theory of Norman Fairclough, who has stressed the importance of analysing discourse through texts. In this case, I have analysed a corpus of three sets of texts. Firstly, I examined the social work literature on LAC, the Assessment Framework and SCARF to identify the authors’ explanation of the production of the texts, and clarify dominant and contested discourses. I also explored the inchoate academic understanding, emanating from a range of disciplines, about technology. Analysis of academic literature however, proved to be a limited way to understanding the range of discourses in LAC and SCARF, because of the way that power relations among social work academics affected what was published. I consequently analysed a second set of texts - that is, the forms that make up LAC and SCARF. The third set of texts that I analysed was the transcripts of semi-structured interviews that I conducted with children, young people and parents to identify these service users’ ‘subject positions’ on discourses, and their own knowledge of the case management systems.

The methods that I have used are those suggested by Fairclough (1992), of text oriented discourse analysis (TODA). In applying TODA, the three sets of texts required different emphases in analysis. In analysing the social work literature, I am concerned with the conditions of production of the text. In analysing the second set of text - the forms, I am also concerned with themes, textual features and discursive practices. In the interview set of texts, I am particularly interested in understanding the conditions of production of the interviews and their analysis. It was here that I used theory related to qualitative method that stressed the importance of understanding research as a negotiated ‘social event’ (Alvesson 2002), involving power. I was interested to analyse my own involvement. Research in child welfare is challenging given Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge, and the limited opportunities service users have for exercising power.
I sought to develop methods extending beyond the limits of my personal interpretation of discourses. In the design, implementation and interpretation of the study, I considered the role of power in generation of knowledge. Where I identified the subjugation of service users’ voices, I attempted to address the effect of power, to the extent possible given the limitations identified by Foucault’s theory. While I have focused on service users’ interpretations, I have pointed to the need for further research on workers’, carers’ and managers’ interpretations of LAC and SCARF. The use of three sets of texts to analyse discourse was significant, as it further reduced my exercise of power in the semi-structured interviews as any researcher works within a framework of assumptions: ‘empirical material can be seen to be produced within discourses or ... impregnated with theory’ (Alvesson, 2002 p.163).

4.1.3 Criteria for quality

In the study, I aimed for research that was trustworthy, plausible, authentic and useful (Alvesson, 2002). Criteria for quality in social research have changed with contemporary shifts in epistemology. Positivist criteria for quality research, which focused on reliability, internal validity, generalisability and objectivity, have been challenged (Alvesson, 2002). There is, however, little agreement on non-positivist criteria for quality (Smith & Deemer, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004) have suggested: credibility (the data representing the phenomena appropriately), transferability to other contexts, dependability (replicability of the findings) and confirmability as important. This debate is far from resolved, and there are a range of views about the extent to which research can be distanced from ‘truth-claims’. Eventually I concurred with Alvesson’s (2002 p.166) position, which includes positivist criteria but with a concern to reflect ‘post empiricist’ insights. This view allows:

...support of knowledge claims through empirical material based on: (a) care, awareness and insightful handling of the production/construction processes; and (b) care in the interpretation of it ... Important here is the working back and forth between considerations of how theoretical frameworks, cultural
assumption, personal subjectivities and the various uses of vocabularies and interpretive moves do construct empirical realities, but in qualified ways.

This is exemplified in my emphasis on identifying the role of power in the research setting and endeavoring to remain aware of my own values throughout the project (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004).

4.2 TEXT ORIENTED DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Linguists suggest that analysis of texts is an important means to identify discourses (Fairclough, 1992, 2001, 2003), and I have drawn heavily on the methods suggested by Fairclough known as ‘text oriented discourse analysis’ (TODA). Fairclough developed a three-dimensional concept in which social practices, discursive practices (production, distribution and consumption of discourses) and text are inter-related. TODA is a technique that oscillates:

...between a focus on specific texts, and a focus on what I call the “order of discourse”, the relatively durable social structuring of language, which is itself one element in the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices (Fairclough, 2003 p.3).

TODA includes linguistic analysis but it is wider in scope in the sense that it also includes: ‘interdiscursive’ analysis, that is, seeing texts in terms of different discourses, genres and styles that they draw upon and articulate together (Fairclough, 2003 p.3).

Although TODA is not a rigidly structured technique, Fairclough suggests three main areas of analysis:

- social practices. Here he recommends identifying the social and ideological relations of which the text is a part, the order of discourse of text and the impact of the text on systems of knowledge, social relationships and personal, social and institutional identity.
• features of the text. He states: ‘It is a sensible working hypothesis, that any sort of textual feature is potentially significant in discourse analysis’ (Fairclough, 2003 p.74).

• discursive practices. He is concerned with three elements here: the production, distribution and consumption of texts.

The production of the text covers issues such as the style, the type of discourse the texts draw on, and the conditions under which texts are developed and used. The most significant elements of the conditions of production for this study are ‘interdiscursivity’ (the discourse types drawn on and how this is done (Fairclough, 1992 p.232)), and ‘manifest intertextuality’ (the way the texts draw specifically on other texts). Discursive practices also include the way in which the text is distributed. For example, the number and types of audiences that are anticipated, and the understanding of ‘intertextual chains’ (how the text ‘enters into ... the series of text types it is transformed into or out of’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.232)). The final aspect of discursive practice is the way that the text is ‘consumed’ or interpreted. Of concern here is how coherent the text is to its audiences. Put another way, ‘consumption involves the interpretive implications of the intertextual and interdiscursive properties of the discourse’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.233).

Fairclough states that his three ‘dimensions’ of discourse will inevitably overlap and that analysis: ‘involves a progression from interpretation to description and back to interpretation’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.231). Chapters 5–7 utilise TODA to identify discourses in the written texts of LAC and SCARF forms.

4.3 TEXT SET ONE: THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE

My initial approach to identifying discourses was based on Foucault’s view that discourses are powerfully maintained within academic commentary and disciplines (Foucault, 1990). I therefore looked to the social work literature on LAC and SCARF to identify the discourses and statements used in case management systems. Furthermore, since power relations are most clearly evident in instances of resistance (Olssen, 2006), I
focused on areas in the literature that are contested. I then moved on to examine the wider discussion, from a range of disciplines, on the subject of ICT.

### 4.3.1 Social work literature on LAC and SCARF

The initial set of texts that I explore relates to the conditions of production of LAC and SCARF, that is, commentary by the authors and academic critics of the case management systems. I aimed to comprehensively evaluate the English-language social work literature on LAC and SCARF through exploring journals, books, conference papers and material available on the internet. I aimed to identify the earliest commentary. I was particularly interested in studies undertaken in Canada, which are relevant to Australia because of the similar federal structure of government in these two countries, although Canadian studies have not always been considered in the English and Australian social work literature (for example Yeatman and Penglase (2004)). In my analysis, I focus on exploration of themes, areas that were contested, and on the discursive practices of academic literature.

The social work literature on LAC and SCARF is limited as a vehicle for discourse analysis for two reasons. Firstly, it does not identify the whole range of discourses because power relations significantly determine which commentary is published, and what debate is permissible within child welfare. Only particular people have the ability and authority to enter academic debate; academic journals are usually open only to people in particular institutional settings, and those individuals must comply with both the publication standards of the journal and the scrutiny of academic reviewers. A review conducted by Yeatman and Penglase (2004) of the social work literature on LAC showed that it was overwhelmingly generated by academics, and no front-line welfare workers or service users were represented. Secondly, the social work literature can only partially contribute to the understanding of discourse, as it does not consider in adequate detail the conditions of ‘consumption’ or interpretation of the LAC and SCARF forms. Fairclough (1992) points to the importance of understanding the ‘consumption’ of texts in discourse analysis, and this needs to include the lived experience of service users. Nonetheless, the social work literature provides a valuable starting point, and importantly, provides information on the ‘subject positions’ of social work academics.
who have been significant in the development of LAC and SCARF (an issue explored in Chapter 9).

### 4.3.2 Literature on the use of technology

I have examined emerging academic literature on the impact of ICT to explore the communication ‘affordances’ (that is, the possibilities and limitations) of ICT. Theory on the nature of ICT and its impact is becoming increasingly specialised, but it draws on a longer academic tradition relating to the study of technology. This literature has been developed within a wide variety of disciplines, including psychology (for example Christensen, Griffiths, & Jorm, 2004), linguistics (for example Crystal, 2006) and law (for example Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). I identified this literature through library searches of books and international journals.

### 4.4 TEXT SET TWO: THE LAC AND SCARF FORMS

The second set of texts that I have examined is the ‘forms’ which comprise LAC and SCARF. These are the forms originally developed in the United Kingdom but adapted to Australia by the LAC Project. The use of these forms is initiated by workers, and completed by both social workers and service users, who in Fairclough’s terms (1992) are the ‘co-animators’ of the forms.

In analysing the LAC and SCARF forms, I am particularly focused on features of the texts and discursive practices. These include:

- ‘interactional control’, that is, the larger-scale organisational properties of the text on which the orderly function and control of interactions between participants in the use of the text depend. For example, turn taking, structuring of discussion, agenda setting and the structure of exchanges;
- cohesion (relationship between clauses and sentences);

---

6 The numbers referred to for LAC and SCARF questions in the following chapters were correct in 2006; however, these numbers may have changed in subsequent revision of the forms on the website. Re-numbering is an ongoing process, and hence numbers should be treated as indicative of area only.
• politeness (as a measure of differences among participants);
• ethos (the diverse features of the texts which create individual identity);
• grammar, wording and metaphors;
• transitivity (to see which participants are favoured by the texts);
• themes; and
• modalities (the affinity of the text for its purpose)
• production, distribution and ‘consumption’ or interpretation of the texts.

Using TODA was complex, as LAC and SCARF forms relate to a wide range of social practices. Both case management systems are used in a range of ways in child welfare, including compulsory intervention, and supervision of workers by managers. They have many purposes, being management data systems, research tools, files for case notes, and often the only personal history of a child’s life (Yeatman, Dowsett, Fine & Guransky, 2009). They have also been designed for a range of individuals who have diverse interests and competencies, including managers, children, foster carers and researchers. Furthermore, they can be used in a variety of ways, for example, directly by children, or merely as background checks for workers.

4.5 TEXT SET THREE: INTERVIEWS WITH SERVICE USERS

The third set of texts that I used is the transcripts of my interviews with service users. As argued in Chapter 1, service users’ contributions are critical as they are now supposedly partners, and central to, the intervention. Fairclough (1992) argues that discourse analysis requires an understanding of the consumption of text in order to adequately study discourses and service users are likely to bring unique understandings of case management systems from their position on the periphery of power. Service users’ knowledge must also be seen as critical to the legitimacy of knowledge claims, given wider societal trends to democratisation (Fairclough 1992).

Semi-structured interviews are a unique form of text in that they were generated specifically for this study. Therefore, I have been concerned to understand the conditions of production of this text, particularly the operation of power, in analysing
discourses. I have approached the design, implementation and interpretation of the research study by seeing it as:

- a ‘site’ for negotiation in which each individual is capable of exercising power and resistance;
- a set of dynamic and complex relationships between individuals and discourses; and
- influenced by my own positioning as the researcher (Alvesson, 2002; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003 p.167).

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to exploring those conditions.

4.5.1 Research design

In my design of this study, I was influenced by the agendas of the individuals and institutions that established the parameters of this research, and I needed to reflect on the ways in which service users were excluded from the design process. Initial decisions were made by the industry partner in negotiation with the University. These decisions were determined by the industry partners’ requirements, academic standards and the available resources. My attempts to introduce opportunities for service users to exercise power later in the design were of limited effectiveness, because of the social circumstances of service users and their limited opportunities to exercise power.

4.5.1.1 The exercise of power by the research partner in defining the topic

Initial decisions regarding the topic and the resources for this study were made by the ‘industry partner’, Barnardos Australia (a member of the LAC Project, which is the eastern Australian licensee of LAC and SCARF). The Chief Executive considered that the study would need to be conducted under the supervision of a university to increase its credibility and to widen academic debate on case management. Barnardos Australia had already had Australian Research Council grants to study LAC and SCARF in partnership with the University of New South Wales (Fernandez, 2000, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007a, 2007b; Fernandez & Romeo, 2003). At the time that the study was
conceived, the University of Western Sydney was inviting industry partnerships for PhD study as part of a strategy to increase research with organisations that were of interest to Western Sydney (the site of many Barnardos welfare programs). As an employee of Barnardos Australia, I was selected by Barnardos’ Board to make an application (see Chapter 1).

Opening practice to the power of others was a risk for Barnardos Australia, which had a strong financial investment in the case management systems. Both the senior management and the Board of Barnardos Australia, however, were committed to independent research.

4.5.1.2 University exercise of power in research design

The University had a strong impact on service users’ opportunities to exercise power in the research design. Significant elements of the initial research were developed to comply with requirements of University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (UWSHREC), and with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research policy of the Australian Medical Research Council.

These provisions aimed to limit the power of the industry partner, Barnardos Australia, as well as provide opportunities for service users to exercise power over the research processes. The University also controlled the resources to be used in this study. Barnardos Australia was to have no part in the development of the research. Supervision of the research was entirely in the hands of the University, and the industry partner was only informed of progress in formal meetings between the Chief Executive and the University supervisors. Publications arising from the study were submitted to academic journals without discussion with Barnardos Australia, which also agreed to have no control over the submission of the thesis for examination.

Many of the provisions of UWSHREC approval aimed to create opportunities for service users to control their involvement and to restrict the power of the researcher. These provisions included: informed consent and the establishment of a complaint protocol; timing of reimbursement, to reduce the opportunities for any researcher to
exercise power (payment was at the beginning of the interview rather than at completion, to reinforce the principle that participants could withdraw at any time); provisions for confidentiality; and a requirement for permission for digital recording. In addition, service users were offered control over the time and location of the interviews (Barker & Weller, 2003). The ethics application that I made was based on my concern to take into account the participants’ capacity to make decisions to be involved; to treat consent as a process in which power relations may dominate.

The conditions for UWSHREC research approval that were ultimately negotiated contained elements that appeared to run counter to providing opportunities for service users to exercise power. Some elements of University involvement clearly limited the voices of the least powerful participants. Service users were both excluded from participating in the design of the research, and subjected to the greater power of the welfare agencies, and to adult power (in the case of the children).

UWSHREC conditions affected the selection of participants by allowing welfare agency managers and case workers to become gatekeepers to service users. This is an issue identified as problematic in research with children and young people particularly (Leonard, 2005). To ensure that I as the researcher would not apply pressure to service users, the UWSHREC required senior managers in welfare agencies to approve any approach to potential participants, and agency workers were solely responsible for contact. The requirement that parents had to approve of their children’s involvement, allowed adults to exercise power over children and young people. The perceived vulnerability of younger children excluded children under the age of nine altogether, because only older children (over eight years of age) were allowed to participate. Furthermore, participants who were still using welfare services were also excluded from the study, and as a consequence, some young people with long histories of use of LAC and SCARF could not be included in this study.

UWSHREC also strongly influenced the amount of financial reimbursement offered to participants, and that potentially limited the involvement of the poorest service users.
This occurred because of the financial limitations of a PhD study program\(^7\), but also because of the ethics approval process. UWSHREC was concerned that the level of payment should not act as an inducement to participate, and the rate was set at $50 per interview (in 2006). Reimbursement has been used in a number of studies of welfare service users (Barlow, Kirkpatrick, Stewart-Brown, & Davis, 2005), although views on this practice are divided:

Some ethical research guidelines have advocated [reimbursement], as an acknowledgment of the participant’s time and contribution (National Children’s Bureau 1993; Ward 1997). Other guidelines (such as the Code of Practice of the Centre of the Child and Society University of Glasgow) are strongly against such practice (Cree, Kay & Tisdall, 2002 p.52)

Reimbursement proved to be an important issue for those service users who agreed to be involved in this study, with participants frequently commenting on its importance in interviews. For example:

Interviewer: What would make young people want to do [an] interview?

Nineteen year old: $50 ... I think everybody wants to help but it just depends how much.

It is not possible to tell what impact reimbursement ultimately had on participation rates (as UWSHREC conditions required that I not contact service users who did not respond to the invitation to participate). Given service users’ comments, and the significant implications for research with service users, further understanding of this issue is important.

Other UWSHREC conditions, such as the need for written contact with potential participants, required research methods that relied on service users being literate, and

---

\(^7\) The budget was supplemented by the University of Umeå, Sweden, which wished to compare young people’s experiences of LAC in Australia and Sweden, and used some of my coded material.
this led to further exclusions of some of the most vulnerable service users from the study. Caseworkers were requested to give service users written material, and ask them to respond to me directly in writing (this was intended to ensure that agency managers and caseworkers would not know if the potential participant had agreed to become involved in the research). This contact process required a high level of literacy and organisational skills, and may have excluded service users in disrupted social circumstances (Barnardos Australia, 2003). Despite the fact that I made every effort to ensure ‘user-friendly’ documentation and processes, it is probable that the UWSHREC requirement about the level of literacy of service users in the application process created barriers for some service users.

4.5.1.3 Determining method prior to service user involvement

A further design issue that was determined by University involvement, before service users were involved, concerned the academic approach to the research. In order to gain UWSHREC approval, it was necessary to outline the methods to be used and the choice of participants in advance.

Following preliminary exploration of the social work literature on LAC and SCARF, I submitted an ethics application based on qualitative methods. My preliminary research had suggested that qualitative methods appeared best suited ‘to provide a space for research subjects to express their opinions in their own words’ (Alvesson, 2002p.64). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to flexibly explore the operation of power and resistance in case management. The intent was to minimise my control over topics, and I used open-ended questions that allowed the participants’ narratives to dominate. Questions were worded in such a way as to encourage longer responses than simply ticking boxes (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). I sought to be attentive to service users’ ‘own linguistic formulations’, and to devise ‘ways the interview might be designed so that the respondent’s voice comes through in greater detail’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002 p.18). I adopted this approach even though qualitative methods have been criticised as biased, anecdotal, difficult to compare, lacking adequate sampling, and limited in effectiveness, since they rely on individual accounts of experiences and
may not be generalisable (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Nevertheless, though I aimed at methods intended to increase service users’ voices, they were not involved in the design of this process.

A provision that I considered important was the engagement of service users who had completed their involvement with the welfare agency. My interest in this criterion was to reduce any possibility of the welfare agency being able to exert power over the service users. In making this provision, I recognised that I excluded many young people with long-term experience of case management, who were still involved with their welfare agency.

4.5.1.4 Attempts to involve service users in design

Because many decisions about design had been made without the participation of service users, once the ethics approval had been granted, I implemented strategies to open opportunities for service users to influence subsequent decisions. These opportunities involved consultation with representative bodies, forming an advisory group, and working with a co-researcher, drawn from the participants. These strategies had only limited impact.

My first strategy was consultation with representative groups of service users and involved approaches to AbSec (Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW)), which represented agencies working with Indigenous children and families, and to CREATE, the representative group for young people in care. Consultation centered on questions of the appropriateness of the research design, how to involve participants, and the best way to ensure that service users’ experiences would be heard. Consultation with these two groups was only partially successful in increasing service users’ power over design. CREATE adopted the study as one of its research priorities (one of two projects of the hundreds of research requests CREATE receives annually). The organisation was not able to commit staff time to consultation. AbSec’s involvement was also limited. It was experiencing considerable management upheaval, and was without a coordinator at the time of my approach. Ultimately, I had some limited advice from AbSec committee members by e-mail. This experience of
consultation may be typical of organisations dealing with complex community problems with low levels of resources. The advice I received resulted in my excluding Aboriginal users of LAC from the study (and only involving Aboriginal users of SCARF). The reason for this was that more resources were needed than could be offered through a PhD program to address the sensitive issues involved with children in out of home care. As a result, I have worked outside this project, in my professional employment with Barnardos Australia, to develop a research alliance between the LAC Project and the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), which will explore the issue of cultural planning in out of home care. This research has a budget of over $200,000 and was begun in 2007 (LAC Project, 2007b).

My second strategy to increase service users’ control was based on the understanding that the consultation processes did not cover all service users, that is, it excluded those who did not belong to representative groups. I therefore considered separate consultations with these groups, namely, parents or extended families of young people in care (who did not have a representative body in New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory at the time), and very young children in care who similarly had no body directly representing their interests (CREATE has only older members). In an attempt to redress the exclusion of parents from the design process thus far, I organised an advisory group of parents who had used SCARF, but this approach had significant limitations. I had expected that using a group process would lessen my own influence over discussions, but the nature of the group and the limited resources available meant that this goal was difficult to achieve. Many participants were unable to commit to involvement in the group until the day it was due to meet, despite assistance with transport and child care (social workers who organised the participants explained this was the result of their chaotic lifestyles). This meant the group was larger than expected and therefore difficult to lead. Furthermore, the participants did not appear to be comfortable being involved in a group, and seemed uneasy talking about highly emotional periods of their lives—a phenomenon also noted in research with young people (Curtis, Robert, Copperman, & Liabo, 2004; Gallagher, 2008). The dynamics of interactions within the group were also difficult, with a number of participants unused to ‘turn-taking’ (this phenomenon was also noted by Gallagher, 2008). In retrospect, it
became clear that it would have been useful to have had an independent chair for this group, so that I could have had more limited influence on the direction of conversation. Despite these difficulties, the group raised important issues not previously discussed in the social work literature on LAC and SCARF. The issues raised in the group are outlined in Chapters 5–8 and included with findings from the individual interviews.

While I was concerned to consult with participants who may reflect a wide range of service users’ views, this proved not to be possible with some ‘groups’. I could not find a representative group of parents of children in care (there was no local ‘consumer’ group at this time in New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory), and it was not possible to form a group of my own because it was not feasible, within my resources, to get the parents of children in care together, as they were geographically dispersed. The stigma involved in being seen as ‘failing as a parent’ could also have limited the numbers who wished to be involved in a group that I could only have convened once. Extended family members and younger children were also not included, as they did not fit the UWSHREC criteria for the study. These limitations should be addressed in further research in this area.

The third of my strategies to increase service users’ opportunities to exercise power was to involve a co-researcher in the interview process to assist me in the interviews and interpretation. I was influenced by ‘decolonising methodologies’ theorists who draw attention to the ways in which traditional research has been dominated by powerful interests. The results of research have further enhanced that domination (Smith, 1999). Smith (1999 p.3) describes the resulting research as having:

...absolute worthlessness to [colonised or powerless people] ... and absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument.

Decolonising methodology theorists suggest using techniques that recognise local knowledge. I therefore recruited a mother who had used SCARF and who was recommended to me by one of the welfare programs. Although I asked social workers for a number of names of potential co-researchers, there was only one forthcoming. I
recruited an Aboriginal woman\(^8\) from a family support program. Decolonising methodologies also stress the importance of ‘giving back’ to the group being studied. Service users involved in child welfare are among some of the least economically and socially powerful individuals in Australia and these methodologies appeared very appropriate to this study. I was able to provide sessional payment, a reference to assist my co-researcher in future employment, and training sessions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Involvement of a co-researcher proved to be an important element of the research; it aided communication in interviews and challenged my views during ‘de-briefing’. Its overall impact is, however, difficult to gauge. The co-researcher was important as she continually re-interpreted questions to participants, and used words in ways that I would not. However, she also introduced new power relations into the research, and I found I was ill-equipped to understand them because I was an ‘outsider’ to the group of Aboriginal participants. I was not in a position to judge local community politics, kinship ties and cultural taboos, which may have been operating within the interview situation (Schafer & Yarwood, 2008). The process of recruitment could have been improved, and requires further attention in future research.

Overall, the design process significantly limited the opportunities for service users to exercise power despite my active attempts to use the strategies, described above, to provide these opportunities. Those attempts were limited in success largely because of the complex power relations, including the impact of socio-economic disadvantage both on service users and on the organisations seeking to represent them.

---

\(^8\) No Torres Strait Islanders participated in the study
The size of this study was constrained by the resources available to a PhD project. Working within a qualitative approach, I aimed at the number of participants that would provide depth but also a breadth of experiences.

In determining the number of participants, I was not concerned with quantitative criteria for ‘representative samples’. The concept of ‘generalisability’ of findings in qualitative research, as in all research, needs to be treated with caution, and I make no further claim for my findings than that they are an attempt to represent what I was told by a small number of service users from a limited number of welfare agencies. Nevertheless, generalisability may be ‘inevitable, desirable and possible’ (Williams, 2000 p.209) in qualitative research, and I wanted my findings to be seen ‘as instances of a broader recognisable set of features’ (Williams, 2000 p.215). My goal in selecting participants was therefore to maximise the potential breadth of the study, as well as pursuing depth.

In an attempt to maximise the range of experiences of case managed interventions, I was concerned to find participants of both sexes who belonged to as wide a spread as possible of age groups, jurisdictions, welfare programs, and family types. The term ‘service user’ is often restricted to the birth parents, but I aimed to expand that definition to include friends, grandparents, tribal elders, siblings and other kin (Daniel & Taylor, 1999). I was ultimately not successful in attracting service users other than children, young people and their parents, as I was dependent on welfare agencies to refer service users for the study. It is unclear why these provider’s workers only approached limited groups of service users. Foster carers were not included in this study as they are regarded as service providers, rather than service users.

The depth of my interviews was limited to one session only with participants; interviews took approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. It was not possible, because of time constraints, to have more than one conversation with my co-researcher, and this suggested the possibility that multiple interviews may have had been able to clarify and deepen understandings. Transcripts of the record of interview were sent to participants with invitations to amend any statements, if they considered this appropriate; however, none did so.
4.5.2 Implementation

Like the research design, the selection of participants and the interview\(^9\) settings all proved to be situations that involved ongoing negotiations about power. Although I attempted to maximise service users’ opportunities to exercise power, ultimately the success of this was limited by the impact of power relations such as those involving welfare agencies and workers concerned with locating participants.

4.5.2.1 The selection of participants

I approached all the welfare agencies in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory that held ‘end-licences’ for LAC, in order to get the widest possible account of the experience of LAC, and to limit the influence of my own employer, Barnardos Australia. I also advertised the research on a national child protection web-list, to reach agencies in other states. SCARF was only used in Barnardos at that time, and participants were of necessity limited to that agency. Ultimately, the participants came from only two agencies. It was not possible to explore the reasons why more agencies did not put participants forward (the conditions of the UWSHREC approval precluded this). It may have been the result of my ‘insider’ status within the industry partner, but other researchers also note persistent problems in obtaining consent to conduct research with children (Cree et al., 2002; Leonard, 2005).\(^10\) Another reason may have been resistance by social workers who may have feared scrutiny of their work, or perhaps gave a low priority to the research.

My ‘insider’ status may have been a reason for success in obtaining the participants who did volunteer, because of the opportunity it gave me to exercise personal and organisational influence (Kanuiha, 2000). This did, however; introduce issues that may have led to some bias in the selection of participants. The involvement of agencies, other than my own, may also have led to bias in the selection of participants, given that this agency produced two of the four negative descriptions of participation. It may be that

\(^9\) The interviews were conducted between August 2006 and March 2007.

\(^10\) Although other researchers have described gatekeepers encouraging children to consent see for example: Curtis et al., 2004; Kelly & Mayall, 1996
they were keen to make a particular point to the industry partner. Within Barnardos Australia there was considerable organisational commitment to the research, and bias may have been evident in the selection of participants given that pressure may have been brought to bear on social workers by senior managers who had an investment in completion of the project. I was also aware that, although I did not deal directly with service users in the course of my normal employment, my role as a senior manager could have influenced the kinds of participants who were approached. That is, social workers may have been inclined to select participants who were most likely to reflect well on their practice. I attempted to counteract this possibility by stressing the fact that findings would not be linked to workers, and that I was seeking a wide range of experiences. It may also be possible that workers selected participants wanting to make ‘points’ about any problems that they wished to illustrate about case management systems.

Despite potential concern about parental power in the research literature (Barker & Weller, 2003; Leonard, 2005), this did not appear to be an issue in this research. No parents blocked access to children after initial contact, and no young person withdrew from the study. All young people were offered the opportunity to consent independently from their parents. This provision was based on researchers’ observations that children can find ways of resisting the research process if they do not feel in control (such as not engaging with the interviewer) (Hood, Kelly, & Mayall, 1996; Leonard, 2005).

4.5.2.2 Introducing the participants

The study ultimately involved thirty-two participants (children, young people and parents) from twenty-five families across programs using both LAC and SCARF. Only children, young people and parents ultimately came forward. Twelve participants had used LAC. Eight participants were young people who had been in long-term foster care or adolescent homelessness programs, and had used LAC for up to eight years. Of these eight, three were in their early twenties and living independently, two were eighteen-year-olds who had just finished school and remained in (separate) long-term foster placements, two were fifteen-year-olds who were now adopted, and one was a twelve-year-old who had used LAC in short-term foster placement and was now restored to his
birth father’s care. Four participants who had used LAC were birth parents: two had had their children restored to their care and two had regular contact with their children in long-term care (in one case, eight years of foster placement). These twelve participants included two family groups, that is, the parents of two of the children were also interviewed.

Twenty participants had used SCARF; the majority consisted of mothers who had used semi-supported housing or home-visiting welfare programs. Of this twenty, two participants were from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds and six identified as Aboriginal. The participants were a comparable group to those in earlier SCARF research (that of Fernandez, 2007a), in that most service users had lived with poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, chronic unemployment, intellectual disability or mental illness. Of the twenty, three family groups were involved; three parents with five children between them were interviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT TYPE</th>
<th>LAC</th>
<th>SCARF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total participants (32)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 8–12 years of age (4)</td>
<td>12-year-old boy restored to father’s care following 2 years in care (Family group 1)</td>
<td>Aboriginal sisters aged 8 and 10 years (Family group 3) 11-year-old Aboriginal boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents 13–17 years of age (5)</td>
<td>Two 15-year-old boys now adopted</td>
<td>13- and 15-year-old siblings (Family group 4) 15-year-old boy (Family group 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-care young people in either placement or independent living (5)</td>
<td>Two 18-year-old boys with lifelong histories of foster care (one from Family Group 2) 19-year-old boy in after-care having been homeless for 15 years. Two 20-year-old women who had lived in care over many years</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers (16)</td>
<td>Young mother of a 4-year-old removed from her care for 2 years but now restored (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) Mother from culturally and linguistically diverse background of 18-year-old in long-term care (Family Group 2) Mother with 15-year-old and twin 12-year-olds in permanent care</td>
<td>13 mothers (1 from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds and 3 Aboriginal). (They included the mothers of Family groups 4 and 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers (2)</td>
<td>Father of 12-year-old boy restored to his care (Family group 1)</td>
<td>Father of 2 girls (non-Aboriginal father of 8- and 10-year-old Aboriginal girls) (Family group 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2.3 Maximising service users’ exercise of power over the interview setting

Service users were asked to choose the type of interview, the location and the time that they preferred. No participant chose to use an on-line format (either e-mail or Instant Messaging), despite the fact that this was the only way possible for interstate participants to become involved (in one case, negotiation over the scheduling of the interview occurred by e-mail but the interview did not eventuate). This raises initial questions about service users’ interest in communicating on-line with people they did not know. No participant suggested involvement in a group or any other way of participating. Most individual interviews were conducted in service users’ homes, although a number were held in private areas in public spaces. I provided food in all interview settings, consistent with findings (Curtis, et al., 2004) on its importance in other research involving child welfare service users.

The issue of adult power is frequently cited as a limitation for children and young people’s control in research (Alderson, 1995, 2001; Alderson & Goodey, 1996; Christensen & James 2000; Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Allred & Burman, 2005; Clark, 2005). This has led to recommendations by other researchers to use naturalistic settings, group interviews and increased reciprocity (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Group interviews could not be used in this present research because they were not taken up by service users. I attempted to address the issue of my power as an adult by starting all the interviews with an explanation of the importance of children’s views for the study and acknowledging young people’s exclusion from past research (based on research by Mauthner, 1997). I aimed to address potential concerns over adult power by reassuring young people that confidentiality would be maintained, and that other adults would not be listening to the conversation (although this had to be balanced with child protection concerns and adults were often close at hand). I stressed the need for each young person to provide their own views rather than express what they imagined to be the ‘right’ answer. I reimbursed all participants at the same rate. All the children proceeded with the study, and many took up the offer to keep their own copies of the interview transcripts and booklets, thus indicating that they took some ownership of the process. Not every young person took up this offer.
4.5.2.4 Addressing differences in competency

Many of the participants were children or young people and this raised issues of competency and adult power in the interviews (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). The model of childhood that I adopted was the one of the ‘social child’. That is:

...rather than seeing children as incompetent, children [are seen as interacting] with their environment in different ways than adults (Fattore & Turnbull, 2005 p.54).

I attempted to be attentive to issues of language and literacy, memory, concentration levels, privacy, confidentiality, adult power and children’s own means of negotiating power (Scott, 2000).

To cater for a range of competencies, I developed a colorful booklet (see Appendix 6) with pictures and an inviting ‘non-schoolwork’ format (O’Kane, 2000; Veale, 2005). After initial trials with young people (who were not participants), I developed two booklets: one with pictures that would be more appealing to younger children, and another for older adolescents. I attempted to assess participants’ understanding of words and concepts to ensure that literacy skills did not affect the interviews. The younger children responded well to this approach, although those over 16 years of age were not interested in completing the booklet.

The success of the booklet in engaging children also prompted me to use visual material with some adult participants. I used a visual presentation of the categories (see Appendix 3) and issues explored in SCARF to prompt discussion. My experience with this visual material has led me to believe it is a very helpful method, and challenged my ‘ageist’ assumption that only children would prefer this approach.

4.5.2.5 The semi-structured interviews

I used semi-structured interviews to increase service users’ opportunities to exercise power in the research setting. These interviews focused on accounts of everyday experiences of welfare interventions. The initial structuring of my questions drew on the
discourses identified through analysis of the social work literature and the LAC and SCARF forms (see Appendix 5). The use of this starting point was an important attempt to reduce my input based on my own understanding of the discourses. I was influenced in the scope of my questions by an understanding of the aims of the authors of these systems, the issues that have been contested within social work literature, and an examination of the forms. In raising issues with service users, the ‘semi-structured’ nature of the interviews allowed me to explore subject positions on each of the discourses, the ways that service users interpreted them, and the combination of discourses. I was particularly attentive to issues that service users raised, but that did not appear in the social work literature on LAC and SCARF (that is, subjugated discourses of the service users).

The interview situation was itself a site for ongoing negotiation and shifting interpretations. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) describe the interview as a situation in which both the service user and interviewer, together construct versions of reality. Approaches to social research are strongly dependent on the epistemological position the researcher adopts. Alvesson (2002) describes three main approaches:

- ‘neopositivism’, which aims to establish a context-free truth, heavily preoccupied with objectivity, neutrality, the removal of bias, and minimising researcher influence;

- a romantic approach in which a more genuine human interaction is sought through rapport, trust and commitment between interviewer and interviewee; and

- post-modern approaches in which the interview is viewed as a localised social event, in which a ‘meaning-making’ process unfolds.

My approach mirrored the third of these views, and I attempted to identify the issues that both service users and I myself brought to the interview setting. This approach seemed more consistent with the view of power as exercised in negotiation used in this study, based on Foucault (1990).
Considerations of how workers and agency managers may respond to their answers seemed to affect service users’ approach to the interviews. Although I felt that the interviews flowed easily, I sometimes discerned a guardedness on the part of the participants, particularly in relation to discussions about their social workers. Promises of confidentiality did not appear to mean a great deal; young people and parents did not read or consider the consent forms without being prompted to do so and being given a verbal explanation. I was conscious that some service users seemed to be protecting their social workers from criticism when I tried to explore their less positive experiences. Children also appeared to be wary of what they were saying and protective of their parents. For example, two young sisters played down their father’s drinking. I was aware of Gubrium and Holstein’s (2003 p.39) warning:

Is there only one story for a given respondent to tell, or can there be several to choose from ... which of those are most “tellable” under the circumstances (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003 p.39)

As the interviewer, I was also conscious of my own role in the construction of meaning. I was aware of the difficulties of interpreting the complex power relations in the interview setting. I agreed that:

The interview is an interpersonal drama with a developing plot and is part of a broader claim that reality is an ongoing, interpersonal accomplishment (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

Because some service users appeared to change their accounts, I regularly ‘checked’ my understanding of what I was being told by asking additional questions. I suggested other aspects of the accounts in order to explore whether alternative versions were possible. This approach seemed to lead to more detailed conversation. I used ‘insurance questions’ to check my understanding of meanings that I might have missed, such as asking participants to describe LAC or SCARF to a peer, how they would redesign the forms (as advocated by Krueger & Casey, 2000). When I noted inconsistencies, I challenged them for greater clarity (as suggested by Rosenblatt, 2003). I was aware that interviewees altered their positions, sometimes because their initial responses reflected
others’ views of them. For example, some young people began by describing themselves as lazy or uncaring, but subsequently shifted in their descriptions of themselves. I was also aware that descriptions of the interventions often changed during the interviews. For example, participants frequently became more critical as the interview progressed.

4.5.3 Interpretation

Interpretation began during the interviews, and continued throughout my subsequent immersion in the interview material, as I coded and categorised (Green et al., 2007). The issues that were of greatest concern to me were related to my understanding of my own position, and to my capacity to capture the widest possible variety of service users’ accounts. I was mindful of the view that ‘subjects are assumed to be fragmented and varied, their claimed experiences, viewpoints and interests are also contradictory, heterogeneous and multiple’ (Alvesson, 2002, p. 130).

4.5.3.1 Transcription and computerised coding

I recorded each interview, and did the transcribing myself, revising the codes a number of times. In order to reduce the impact of my own position, a university supervisor also reviewed the coding.

Transcription brought unexpected reminders of the subtle and ongoing influence of the researcher’s potential to influence ‘meaning-making’. There are many reasons why transcription can affect meaning: interpretations of grammar, the use of paraphrasing, omissions because of playback gaps, mistakes in the understanding of words, poor quality recording, transcriber interpretation errors or concentration lapses, ‘tidying up’ of disjointed narratives, and differences in the degree of detail recorded (Poland, 2003). In order to ensure consistency, I undertook all the transcription myself, spending considerable time replaying the taped interviews to ensure accuracy. One important example of the researcher’s ability to exercise power in the interpretation was the fact that the interviewees often became less audible during descriptions of emotional material. The transcription process was undertaken as soon as possible after each interview in order to capture the emotional context of the interview, and to minimise any distortion due to lapses of memory on my part.
I used computerised coding to analyse the transcripts and found this helpful in handling data. Software analysis has been criticised for focusing on the elements, of the interview, rather than on the overall meaning (Charmaz, 2003). Advocates of computer-assisted qualitative analysis, however, argue that:

Computers offer assistance with the management of complex data. They also, with more difficulty, can be used in the discovery and management of unrecognised ideas and concepts, and the construction and exploration of explanatory links between data and emergent ideas, to make fabrics of argument and understanding around them (Richards & Richards, 1998 p.213).

I found the computer program ‘NVIVO’ helpful because it facilitated the focus on service users’ responses, maintained a record of data, enabled retrieval of information, and assisted with the process of analysis. I undertook a number of reiterations of coding and categorisation, attempting to ensure that the themes (nodes) and hierarchy of concepts (tree nodes) reflected the meanings of service users.

Throughout the coding process, I aimed to maintain the exact language and concepts of the service users, and to write my findings drawing heavily on their words. In coding the findings, I compared discourses with those identified through the social work literature and from analysis of the LAC and SCARF forms, attempting to identify service users’ ‘subject positions’, and discourses not evident in the social work literature. In the coding, I tried to be aware of my own ‘filters’, bearing in mind Alvesson’s (2002 p. 132) warning that ‘the ideal of a well integrated theoretical frame of reference should be treated with caution’. For example, in my analysis of power relations, I initially used coding for issues such as whether or not service users felt that they were able to exercise influence over social workers, and whether they felt listened to or ignored. I became increasingly aware however, that my coding was shaped by the hierarchical models of power underpinning social work concepts of participation at that time (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001). These models seemed to be inadequate for explaining the dynamics of what was being described by service users. Foucault’s theoretical approach to coding the interviews ultimately proved satisfactory. This approach seemed to better
accommodate service users not taking up opportunities to participate, and the conflict between service users and social workers (Tregeagle & Mason, 2008).

4.5.3.2 Attention to diversity

In my account of the findings, I aimed to present the most common views expressed by service users but also to highlight the range of responses and the diversity in experiences of case management systems. Throughout the interpretation of my findings, I also aimed to acknowledge changes in each individual’s account, for example, when someone moved from an uncritical acceptance of social workers to more questioning views. I attempted to identify where there may be subjectification and areas of resistance in service users’ responses, by identifying ambiguity and discontinuity in their accounts.

Those who described atypical experiences frequently highlighted issues that were mirrored in less extreme ways in others’ accounts. Four service users, for example, described withdrawing or being excluded from LAC and SCARF in circumstances that although very different from each other, seemed to be reflected in others’ comments. I noted differences over time (for example, accounts of working relationships that were initially good but that subsequently involved conflict), and any internal inconsistencies that became evident. Other service users were less critical, but their accounts often mirrored aspects of the more critical descriptions.

4.5.3.3 Identifying my positioning

Theorists draw attention to the role of the researcher as a co-constructor of meaning, both in the interview and in the interpretation process. Consequently, I attempted to identify my impact on both the interaction with participants and the coding described above (Elden, 1978; Kanuiha, 2000).

As an ‘insider’ of the industry partner, a paid employee of Barnardos Australia, I had to acknowledge issues of:
distance from the project, the participants, and indeed even the process of *studying one’s own people ... both intellectually and emotionally* (Kanuiha, 2000 p.5).

I was not only an insider of the agency, I was also a social worker, and hence I found it difficult to avoid making assumptions about practice. I found it useful to reflect on my social work background using Ife’s (1997) conceptualisation of the Australian social work profession, as one which is service-driven, secular (not based in religious beliefs) and committed to the individual. As an agency insider, I found that I was often ‘second guessing’ what might have been happening in the relationship between social workers and service users, and this could have prevented me from hearing what service users were saying about the help they received. One example was my response to the mother who complained that she was not receiving enough attention from social workers – I was tempted to assume that her frustration was inevitable because of the limited resources available. I attempted to identify issues of insider values, and to employ techniques to lessen their impact (recognising them and considering alternate interpretations).

University supervision was an important safeguard to ensure that I asked the ‘hard’ questions about my findings, and it helped me look at a range of possible explanations. I also sent copies of transcripts and summaries to service users (member-checking), and compared results with other studies: with studies of LAC, the Assessment Framework and SCARF (see Chapter 1); with more general service users’ studies in family support (Gray, 2003; Holland, 2000; Kapp & Vela, 2004; Matos & Sousa, 2004; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Ribner & Knei-Paz, 2002; Spratt & Callan, 2004; Stratham & Holtermann, 2004); and with studies of service users in out of home care (Alpert, 2005; Baistow & Hetherington, 1998; Colton, et al., 1997; Hetherington & Piquardt, 2001; Hill, 1997, 1999; Thorpe & Klease, 2006).

I found these strategies of limited value. I did not receive any responses from service users. There may have been many reasons for this such as service users’ literacy levels, or the priority that they gave to the research, or that they simply had no dissenting
comment to make, or believed that any further comments made by them may not be heard. Comparison with earlier studies also proved unhelpful because of the limitations of many of the earlier case management studies (as described in Chapter 1).

4.6 CONCLUSION

Drawing on the work of Foucault on discourse, and Fairclough’s theory of the importance of text in discourse analysis, I have attempted to develop methodology and methods suited to exploring child welfare service users’ experiences. I have identified TODA as a means to explore discourses, and have used three sets of texts, with particular relevance to understanding the production and consumption of texts.

In the study, I explored both academic commentary and the LAC and SCARF forms. Using texts other than the interviews was an important attempt to limit my own influence on analysis of service users’ descriptions. Using the discourses that I had identified through the initial two sets of texts, I undertook an analysis of my interviews to explore service users ‘subject positions’ on these discourses, as well as issues that service users saw as important in interventions, but which were not evident to me in the social work literature (‘subjugated discourses’).

In the production of the service user interviews, I aimed to understand the role of power in developing knowledge about case management systems, and to identify and alter those factors in the research process that could subjugate service users’ voices. Ultimately, these attempts seemed to have a marginal impact, and this can best be understood by using Foucault’s concept of power. The exercise of power involved a range of other individuals from a number of organisations, and the formulation of the research’s design resulted from a process of extensive negotiation. Many decisions had already been made by the time service users became involved in the research, because of the industry partnership, the academic criteria and the ethics committee approval process. Moreover, agency managers and social workers were active gatekeepers. My ‘insider’ status, as an employee of the industry partner, also affected the participants, and may have inhibited some service users from coming forward. It is also likely that wider issues of social power were important in the research. Poverty (observable in the
interview setting through the statements of service users and the conditions of the int
erviews settings such as homes) and low literacy levels (described in subsequent chapters), were important limitations to service users’ abilities to exercise power. Options that have been suggested by other researchers to open opportunities for service users to exercise power (Eder & Fingerson, 2003; Hennessy & Heary, 2005), proved to be not feasible (also noted by Curtis et al., p.171). The resources available for the research project did not allow me to undertake multiple interviews with service users and hence allow further clarification and reflection. The low level of reimbursement may have limited the number and type of participants. Furthermore, young children (under eight years of age), and current service users, were excluded from the study.

The need to consider my own impact on the study and maintain vigilance over my own exercise of power was an ongoing challenge. At times, I was uncertain whether I could understand the depth of the texts and the varied subject positions of service users. Attempts to use a co-researcher introduced potentially complex power relations, the effect of which was uncertain. The impact of adult-child power relations on children and young people was also hard to assess.

While the methodology and methods adopted in this study had strengths, I also identified areas where they could be further developed. In reflecting on my methods, it must be noted that the participants in this study are a group that is usually seen as difficult to investigate (Gilbertson & Barber, 2002; Heptinstall, 2000; Leonard, 2005; Valentine, Butler, & Skelton, 2001). Nevertheless, this research was able to overcome the limitations of other published research, in which service users were still dependent on the agency for help (potentially making it more difficult for them to speak openly than in this study). The methods used in this study had some limitations, however. Particular groups of individuals were not included in the study, such as very young children and extended family members, and importantly, children who were still in care. Poverty and low literacy levels may have excluded other potential participants. The service users who were included in this study were those who were still in contact with agencies and had adequate communication channels allowing social workers to contact them. Despite the fact that this study identified a wider range of experiences than
previous studies, caution is needed in generalising the findings of this study. Research with child welfare service users presents many research challenges of an ongoing nature.
Chapter 5
Findings: The aims of LAC and SCARF-based interventions

This is the first of four chapters describing the findings of my study and it addresses the social work aims of case managed interventions. I identify the social work goals designed into these systems by the authors of LAC and SCARF, and then explore service users’ ‘knowledge’ of what would help them. The following chapters (6, 7 and 8) describe findings on the processes through which these social work goals are to be achieved: that is, the planning processes, the alteration of power relations, and the technology applied to the child welfare intervention.

The basis of this chapter is an analysis of the discourses of social work and childhood embodied in LAC and SCARF. I look at the roles of assistance and control in social workers’ approaches to child welfare, and how the goals for individual children are identified. I have used three sets of texts to analyse these discourses. Firstly, I briefly summarise the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and identify what social work academics have seen as key aims of the child welfare interventions. I subsequently analyse discourses in the second set of texts: the LAC and SCARF forms. Finally, I analyse my third set of texts, that is, the transcripts of my semi-structured interviews with service users.

In this chapter I argue that LAC and SCARF are a complex mix of statements that combine the dual aims of ‘assistance’ for children, young people and their parents, with attempts to control their behaviour. As described in Chapter 3, the way assistance and control have been combined in child welfare has been a central issue for social workers since the origins of the profession. The social work academic literature on LAC and SCARF tends to view the case management systems in a highly polarised way, either seeing it as bringing benign assistance or, on the other hand, being a modern form of control of families. Using text analysis, I argue that LAC and SCARF combine both assistance and control in complex ways. Service users also described experiencing both
assistance and control in case managed interventions. My primary finding was that the aims of the intervention accounted for service users’ greatest disappointment in case managed interventions, and this is an area that needs to be re-examined in the development of LAC and SCARF.

The chapter also explores the specific goals of LAC and SCARF in relation to the development of children and young people. I argue here that LAC and SCARF combine competing ‘statements’ of ‘developmentalism’ and the ‘new children’s paradigm’ in their approach to childhood development. (These were described in Chapter 3.) Adult service users and social workers did not object to the way in which concepts of childhood have been combined in LAC and SCARF; however, young people in this study challenged the strong developmentalist emphasis that they identified in the case management systems.

5.1. SOCIAL WORK ACADEMIC DEBATE: ASSISTANCE, WORKER CONTROL AND GOVERNMENTALITY

In this section, I briefly revisit the social work literature on LAC and SCARF described in Chapter 2, and summarise the ‘statements’ (Foucault’s concept for claims to truth that constitute the object of the discourse) that can be identified within them. This literature on LAC and SCARF is conspicuously divided over the aims of case managed child welfare interventions.

Their authors claimed that LAC and SCARF assisted individuals and families to achieve ‘community standards’ of child rearing and development. Assessment of need was ‘based on norms that are prevalent in the general population [so that] it will not be possible to identify those areas where disadvantaged children fall behind their peers’ (Ward, 1995 p.36). The goals for children’s development were identified as age-related in seven specific domains of functioning.
On the other hand, critics of case management systems have seen a ‘norm-setting’ ‘agenda’ in LAC and SCARF. They claimed that the systems focused almost exclusively on establishing middle-class values. These values were seen as ‘controlling’ the behaviour of children and parents, by establishing behavioural norms, with regard to which service users undertook a process of ‘self-policing’. Critics did not recognise any emphasis on the provision of assistance, nor did they compare the attempts of LAC and SCARF at control of behaviour with non-case managed interventions. Advocates of LAC, the Assessment Framework and SCARF have also failed to address critics’ concerns about those elements of the case management systems that represent attempts to control service users’ behaviour.

In all of the social work literature, there has been limited critique of the concepts of childhood embodied in LAC and SCARF. In considering LAC in the United Kingdom, only two authors (Garrett 2003, Winter 2006) have questioned the way childhood has been conceptualised in LAC, and then only to a limited extent. There has been no discussion of this issue related to the Assessment Framework, or of SCARF, in the Australian context.

Before leaving the discussion of the social work literature, it is important to note that the social work literature on LAC and SCARF currently conflates two issues related to control, and it is important to differentiate them in my analysis of service users’ experiences. The first issue is critics’ concern about the control of children, young people and parents as a primary aim of case managed interventions (this is the argument about governmentality that was discussed in Chapter 3). The second issue is concern about control of social workers by managers (the threat of managerialism that was raised in Chapter 3). The social work literature often appears to assume that control over workers and control of service users is the same thing. It is important, however, to differentiate these concerns in this study, as service users found attempts to control them somewhat problematic (as discussed in this chapter), but found attempts to control social workers to be inadequate (discussed in detail in Chapter 7).
5.2. THE LAC AND SCARF FORMS: A ‘BALANCE’ OF ASSISTANCE AND CONTROL

In analysing the forms of LAC and SCARF, I have emphasised the features of the texts and discursive practices and have focused on the ‘orders of discourse’ that the text draws upon by examining the sets of questions comprising the forms. These elements define the assistance to be offered to children and young people, behavioural norms for service users and goals for child development in case managed interventions.

5.2.1 Defining arenas of assistance

LAC and SCARF consist of sets of questions that define the areas of interest of child welfare interventions. These questions are highly detailed and range through a number of areas such as practical, emotional, social support and the development of insight. The forms are weighty, sober and official; their length and formality give an air of legitimacy and importance to the child welfare intervention.

The forms used in both LAC and SCARF establish the areas of interests of child welfare interventions (see Appendix 3) in clearly defined functional domains. The development of children and young people is assessed in terms of health, education, emotional wellbeing, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, and self-care skills. SCARF also includes the areas of ‘parenting capacity’ and ‘family and community’. Parenting capacity’ is understood in terms of the parent’s ability to provide basic care, emotional warmth, guidance and boundaries, and stimulation to the child, in a safe and stable environment. Family and community’ functioning is understood in relation to child protection, drug and alcohol use, health and disability, family history, legal contact, income, education and employment, housing, community resources, social networks, extended family, friends, neighbours and immediate family.

These are the areas prescribed as of concern in case managed interventions, and how social workers are meant to address them is specified through detailed analysis of these topics.
The questions on LAC and SCARF forms frequently concern the practical resources a child or family might need. For example, LAC questions explore resources that might be needed to avoid removal of children and young people into the out of home care system:

If additional resources were available, would care be necessary? (LAC Review of Arrangements: Question 7).

or to maintain contact between parent and child:

*Please indicate whether the child/young person’s relatives and/or carers are receiving financial assistance with travelling expenses?* (LAC Review of Arrangements: Question 13).

This same focus on practical support is evident in SCARF, for example:

*Describe the child/young person’s interest, attendance and progress at school, access to additional educational resources or special needs education if required* (SCARF Child and Family Assessment including Add-Its: Child Development 11–15 years old).

Some of the questions comprising LAC and SCARF forms address social support. LAC questions focus on the relationships between the children and their families or carers, and their formal and informal social networks. These are often very detailed. For example:

*Is the placement within half an hour’s journey by foot or public transport of the child/young person’s home and siblings* (LAC Review of Arrangements: Question 13).

SCARF explores social support by locating the child in his/her local neighbourhood, extended family, friendship groups, social networks and immediate family. For example:
Are there any areas of concern or difficulty of the family in relation to current relationships with extended family members? (SCARF Children and Family Assessment: Extended Family, Friends and Neighbours p.3).

Many of the questions in the LAC and SCARF forms also focus on the emotional support of children, and seek to assess the child’s or young person’s mental wellbeing, identity, and satisfaction with family and social relations. SCARF questions are phrased in such a way as to encourage hope. For example, the question of strengths, rather than needs, is the first to be addressed by workers in summarising the assessment domains, and each SCARF Child and Family Assessment area requires a summary:

- Are there strengths in this area? Yes/No
- Are there needs in this area? Yes/No
- Is this an area the service may consider assisting? Yes/No
- Is a referral recommended? Yes/No

(Child and Family Assessment- multiple inclusions)

Questions in LAC, and to a lesser extent, SCARF, encourage the child and their family members to reflect upon their own circumstances, including their future, and aim for the development of ‘insight’. For example:

What do you hope to be doing in three years time? (LAC Assessment and Action Record, age 10–14 years).

The fact that LAC and SCARF forms involve service users as joint ‘animators’ in the production of the texts, (that is, the forms are completed by both service users and social workers) means that service users are expected to be aware of the assessment process. Furthermore, the instructions on the forms for distribution to service users provide the opportunity for service users to review the areas of assessment over time.
In addition to assessing the types of assistance, both LAC and SCARF forms contain ‘instructions’ that attempt to standardise social workers’ own role in support. The forms attempt to specify the amount of contact between workers and families by describing when the forms should be produced. Both sets of forms contain instructions and questions that attempt to establish the timing of contact between workers and service users—important issues given the low levels of contact described in Chapter 1 before case management systems were introduced to practice. The LAC forms are highly prescriptive about these contacts, and include processes to check compliance. For example:

Dates since admission/last review when the case worker has seen the child/young person and carers (LAC Review of Arrangements: Question 2).

SCARF contains fewer instructions about the level and timing of contact between workers and family members, but the detailed initial assessment has a time frame of five weeks. A high level of contact is needed to complete the forms.

Thus, LAC and SCARF forms attempt to specify the areas of interest to social workers, define the nature of practical, social and emotional assistance and specify social workers’ role in these. Discursive practices aim to include service users in the process of understanding the aims of the intervention. Despite similarities among questions, LAC and SCARF texts are different in the way they establish social work aims. The questions posed in LAC are detailed, and more constrained compared with SCARF. LAC forms rely on tick-box responses that constrain the answers, leaving less space for workers’ discretion. SCARF forms contain more open questions, relying more heavily on worker discretion as to how to answer questions.

5.2.2 Establishing behavioural norms

There are a number of features of the text and discursive practices that attempt to shape behaviour. The distribution of forms among service users may itself exercise a control over behaviour, as it establishes goals for parenting and child development. These concepts have been incorporated by social worker academics, and what they may describe as benign attempts to develop self-reflection or insight, powerfully shape how
service users understand their own situation and problems, and what needs to occur for change to be achieved.

Questions posed on both LAC and SCARF forms also establish particular standards of parenting, child behaviour and attainments for childhood development. The standards range through the domains of basic health and education, to issues of social behaviour in the domains of social presentation, and emotional and behavioural development. Examples include detailed matters of physical care:

*Are the child’s skin and hair cared for appropriately?* (LAC AAR Social Presentation Question P1)

No definition of ‘appropriately’ is suggested.

Other assessment questions require disclosure of service users’ behavioural and social compliance:

- Have you been cautioned by the police or charged with a criminal offence in the past six months? (LAC AAR Fifteen Years and over; Question B3).
- Have you been suspended from school in the last term? (LAC AAR E1).
- Comment on smoking and use of alcohol or other substances which may be detrimental to health (LAC Child Development Health 11–15 years old).
- Consider the young person’s presentation in social settings, including inappropriateness of clothing in relation to the child’s age, gender, culture, personal hygiene and behaviour (Social Presentation 11–15 year olds).

In SCARF these assessment questions predominantly focus on parental behaviour:

*Comment on provision of secure and safe place to live ... on how the parent/carer shows affection ... on methods the parent/carer uses to set limits and direct behaviour ... on awareness of dangers ... and the ability to protect*
them ... comment on encouragement of the young person’s learning ... on consistency of care (drawn from a range of questions under Parental Capacity).

One specific feature of the text attempts to co-opt workers directly into the process of checking behaviour—these are in the guidance notes. Guidance notes are evident on most pages of LAC and SCARF forms. For example:

It is beneficial to talk to the child about their friendships, or to the class teacher; family consent required (SCARF Guidance Note).

These notes attempt to shape practice of workers to actively engage them in assessing behaviour. Chapter 7 will explore the issue of how well social workers were controlled in the case management intervention.

5.2.3 Identifying goals for childhood development

A significant focus of the normative aspects of LAC and SCARF are questions related to establishing age-related milestones for children’s development. The organisation of questions and the questions themselves are based on particular statements (developmentalism of ‘new children’s paradigm) about childhood that appear to be contradictory.

Both LAC and SCARF assessment domains are constructed by age categories and establish norms for child development within each of the domains described above. Age-grading is central, although there are slight differences in the two systems, and SCARF includes a pre-birth category:

LAC: Under one, one to two, three to four, five to nine, ten to fourteen, fifteen years and over.

SCARF: Pre-birth, birth to twelve months, one to two, three to four, five to ten, eleven to fifteen, sixteen years plus.

Both case management systems contain assessment forms up to the age of eighteen years. This is the age at which most Australian legislation defines childhood as ending.
Although some state and territory legislation have requirements for ‘after-care’ to the age of twenty-five, there is no provision in either system to address this requirement. Developmentalist views of childhood, in which the child is seen as moving towards adulthood through specified ages and stages to independence, are thus strong features of the texts. Other elements of the LAC and SCARF forms appear to place children within their current experience and offer them the right to be heard as individuals. The ‘present’ focus of the LAC forms is evident in instructions to workers to use the forms regularly in a child’s life to assess the then-current situation of the child or young person. That is, the focus is on the changing reality of the child’s current experience with review at regular six month or twelve month intervals (see Appendix 1). The forms are also structured so that they relate only to one individual child to ensure that the child is not subsumed to the family or sibling group. There are also specific consultation forms for children to contribute their responses (discussed in Chapter 7). These features reflect aspects of the new children’s paradigm.

Analysis of the LAC and SCARF forms indicates that statements about childhood in case managed interventions align both with developmentalism and the new children’s paradigm, even though developmentalism is strongly in evidence. Age related norms are a characteristic associated with normative developmentalist views of childhood. Other features of the texts, however, appear to reflect the influence of the new children’s paradigm (as described by Prout & James, 1990). One aspect of the forms that appears inconsistent with practice implications of the new children’s paradigm is the fact that the text is provided only in one format, that is, it is more consistent with the adult orientation of developmentalism. The forms are offered only at one level of literacy, set at a standard suitable for literate adults. This issue is evident in service users’ descriptions of written text, and has significant implications for power relations (described further in Chapter 7).

5.3 THE DIVERSITY OF SERVICE USERS’ EXPERIENCES

The social work aims of LAC and SCARF, identified through analysis of the social work literature and the LAC and SCARF forms described above, provided the basis of
questions that I put to service users. I aimed to understand service users’ ‘subject positions’, and to identify knowledge they might have that is not included in the case management system. In the interviews, I posed questions about what assistance service users valued, whether their workers understood family problems, whether service users felt that assessment could be improved, and whether they believed social workers understood children. I asked whether service users were concerned over attempts to control their behaviour, and whether they felt uncomfortable with the workers’ values. I also sought to identify what other assistance service users felt may have helped.

Comments that appear in italics below are direct quotes from the transcripts I made of the interviews with service users. I consider groups of service users’ responses (such as young people, parents), explore comments on LAC separately from comments on SCARF and compare the systems in the conclusion of each section.

5.3.1 The central importance of practical assistance

Both LAC and SCARF service users commented primarily on the importance of practical assistance in interventions.

Adult users of SCARF identified practical assistance with food supplies, provision of housing, and help during unexpected crises as particularly valued. They described the issues of greatest importance to them as:

*Assistance, food assistance...*

Covering the funeral costs and so, in a big way, they have been a big part of keeping us going...

*Well I didn’t have anything so I’d be moving into a house with nothing [if no help had been forthcoming].*

*Food vouchers, that’s the main thing.*

I did like when they took me shopping and stuff, grocery shopping and that, yeah, helping me pay my bills.
I let [my worker] in a lot more than I have with anyone else. When I needed help, and before I even knew, she used to come over and help me clean my house and things like that. She used to do home cuts of my hair.

Such comments were similar whether the intervention was ultimately described as satisfactory or not.

Children whose families used SCARF were similarly conscious of the practical assistance that their families received. Even the youngest participants were clear about the reasons for welfare involvement:

Nine-year-old: *they care about us because my dad’s a sole parent.*

Eight-year-old: and because *he hasn’t got much money for us to get much [sic] things.*

Young people also appreciated practical assistance:

*I can’t remember who, but I had an assignment and I went in there and they helped me finish it. That was important.*

*They help [my carers] financially, ’cause I’m not cheap, I ask for a fair bit like every kid. [The agency] are good in that way, if I want something, like anything educational that helps me in a positive way, they usually pay for it.*

Fear of alienating workers and losing access to assistance was an anxiety expressed by a number of young people.

These comments show that, for both LAC and SCARF users, assistance with practical matters that helped parents to rear their children, or young people to grow up, were very important. The depth of family poverty seemed to mean that this very basic assistance was much appreciated. Assessment was not always satisfactory however.

A number of other parents using SCARF were generally critical of workers’ understanding of practical need in the intervention. They felt that social workers did not comprehend the impact of poverty on their lives.
[Workers] go home to houses that they own, in cars, to husbands; they just don’t know what it’s like to bring up four kids alone.

The higher-ups should come and live in our shoes.

The main pressures would be the budgeting part; the hardship part; not having things there when you need them ... like if you run out say of food. Like you think, if only everyone knew ... when you have nothing people just don’t see that. Like, you know, they think that you just don’t budget properly and things like that, but it’s not as easy as it sounds.

Some parents identified specific limitations in the SCARF-based assessment of the need for practical assistance:

Help people with housing when they really need a house ... it’s like, well, “why talk to someone who can’t help me?”

Service users were also not necessarily pleased with the type of assistance they were offered, as in this example of the accommodation offered to a homeless family:

I just felt, like, caged in, where we were living, it was so small with big gates and everything just felt all caged ...

Another was very dissatisfied with the help that she received:

If they would help me with these kids sometimes [with child care]. It’s driving me insane.

These comments show a wide acceptance of practical assistance, but some significant areas where service users did not believe that the depth or quality of assessment was adequate. The depth of poverty and the nature of the assistance needed is an important area of service users’ subjugated knowledge.
5.3.2 The significance of social support

Important elements of the intervention for many service users were social supports, such as access to formal services, skill development, mentoring, informal networks and assistance in negotiations with agencies. Not all were entirely satisfied, however, with the way that this occurred in the case managed intervention.

Parents using SCARF appreciated support related to child-rearing and household management:

[My worker] just sort of knew how to deal with [my son] and kids with his sort of problems, whereas I was ripping my hair out ...

[They gave me] ideas about how to manage my kids, myself, my food budget, stuff like this ... I used to smack [my son] before I found out that there were other ways to deal with kids ...

A number of mothers indicated that they received helpful assistance with budgeting:

My worker back then helped me with my budgeting, she bought me a folder and envelopes so I put $50 in ... and I thought like WOW, it’s very good and I paid off some bills back then.

One area of social support that service users appreciated was the workers’ assistance in negotiating with other services. One young mother who used SCARF described the worker’s critical role in making other services comprehensible:

Telling me what the doctor says and that ... they come to the doctors for me and the doctor explained things to them, so they can explain it to me ... that’s one good thing they have done.

Assistance with negotiating to obtain information and services was also crucial for young people using LAC. One young man who had had an unsatisfactory relationship with his workers, acknowledged the importance of his carer as a broker to negotiate with the statutory authority:
Without my carers [to negotiate for resources] I’d be stuffed.

For parents who had lost children to the care system, workers’ assistance in negotiating with other welfare agencies and statutory authorities remained important:

[My] worker explained what was going on in the court cases. I understood it mainly, but [my worker] said if I didn’t understand she would explain it.

Not all social support was appreciated. Two eighteen-year-olds in stable long-term care (in separate placements) objected to LAC, as it attempted to impose social (and emotional) support that they did not want. They only wanted financial help, as they lived in ‘normal’ family settings with carers who supported them socially, and who negotiated with the wider service system on their behalf. These young people did not want to actively engage with workers. As one of them put it:

I see it as pointless, the visits. I can understand it in a less stable placement ... I just didn’t see the need for them to be here. All those questions, because I was obviously fine. In a stable placement, not being abused, none of that ... the whole welfare thing I’ve just tried to block it out because it just annoys me. [It stopped me from feeling] normal.

They resented workers’ attempts to offer social support, believing that this was stigmatising, abnormal and unnecessary. Workers, however, had a legal obligation to remain involved and complete the LAC forms.

A second area in which SCARF parents were critical of workers’ understanding of social support related to the need for assistance with extended family obligations. Of the three young mothers who identified strongly with their Indigenous heritage, all raised issues of responsibility to siblings that they did not feel were well understood:

I have a lot of stresses because my little sister is 13 and she’s in foster care and she keeps just running away. She’s suicidal at the moment and it’s really hard to deal with that stuff ...
These service users did not feel that workers understood the importance of extended family among Indigenous people:

Aboriginal people have a different way to other families and of seeing things. *We’re the same people but we all stick together and like a really big family those mobs, that’s why there are parts that [workers] don’t understand.*

It may be that differences in the needs of Indigenous people for social support were not adequately reflected in the case management systems. I explored the issue by asking about the importance of Indigenous social workers when using SCARF. Those who wanted Indigenous workers indicated that a social worker from the same background was better able to understand social needs:

*Aboriginal people know what other Aboriginal people think, ... we all got taught that same thing, we’re all same culture, we all know the same [thing], everything generations past.*

Another young mother, in contact, did not want an Indigenous social worker, and felt that such workers made unhelpful assumptions:

*A non-indigenous worker, I think that they actually let you have a chance of being a mother but supporting your family at the same time ... being non-Indigenous you [have] curiosity ...*

Both sets of responses on the importance of Indigenous social workers raise questions about the sensitivity of SCARF in understanding cultural differences, and individual variations within different cultures.

Not all groupings of service users commented on social support. Young people using SCARF did not comment on the importance of social support in the intervention. This is an issue that is taken up again in Chapter 7, where service users’ engagement with workers is explored. Furthermore, there were no comments from any groups of service users about social workers helping to develop wider networks of social support, or encouraging the breakdown of social isolation. The issue of the importance of extended
family in exacerbating problems in children’s welfare is a significant area of subjugated knowledge.

5.3.3 The need for emotional support

Along with practical and social support, service users identified emotional support from their social workers as important in case managed interventions. It was apparent from the interviews that many service users—both young people who had used LAC and parents who had participated in SCARF-based interventions were socially isolated and had little contact with friends, neighbours or relatives. They often talked about the company, encouragement and hope involved in contact with their social workers.

Some SCARF service users saw their emotional relationships with their social workers as central to their ability to continue to care for their children:

They encourage me to know that I can do things even that I don’t know I can do. They just encourage, you know … give me a bit more of a push … and, um, I don’t know what it is, when I don’t have them around I go downhill really quick. I think I just need them …

Service users valued social workers who demonstrated empathy with their circumstances:

They care, ’cause they have been in the positions like we’ve been in, they’ve been struggling mothers, that’s the good thing about it, they’ve been there.

Parents in family support services valued the personal engagement of their social workers and a sense of shared experience.

A mother with three children in permanent out of home care described her social worker thus:

She’s just very sort of, how to explain, she’s full of love actually, ‘chocas’ [crammed] full of love and caring, but she can be very rigid.
Young people who had used LAC also spoke of the significance of emotional support, given the absence of adults in their lives. The young adults, who had used LAC and now lived independently, often did not have consistent adults or friends in their lives, and had experienced housing instability, changes of schools and peer groups:

[I need] someone familiar, someone who knows me kind of thing ... It sounds stupid, but because I'm been away from my family and stuff, [the agency] is more of a family to me, all the workers are more of a family than my actual family.

A young person, who had a long relationship with a worker, described the important emotional element of that relationship:

It's not really what she says, it's just that she listens and she supports kind of thing...

Young people who had grown up in care appeared to get from their social workers the sort of support that they may, in other circumstances, have received from a family.

Not all service users experienced such positive emotional support. One young mother, who described her difficulty in rearing her children, complained about the limited emotional assistance she was offered, and what she saw as the workers’ disproportionate focus on the needs of the children:

They are meant to talk to me too.

She acknowledged that she had received significant social support, but she remained frustrated as it did not meet her own emotional needs.

Two ‘groups’ of service users also commented differently about emotional support. First, young people whose families used SCARF spoke of their emotional isolation during the welfare intervention. This issue will be explored further in Chapter 7, in which I argue that concepts of childhood embodied in SCARF mean that children were seen as the responsibility of their parents. The second group that did not raise the issue of emotional support was that of the parents using LAC. Nevertheless, these parents did
describe ongoing participation in the intervention, and a preparedness to maintain contact with agency social workers, and certainly seemed to indicate that they felt supported.

5.3.4 The development of insight

A small number of service users using both LAC and SCARF identified the opportunity for reflection on their own lives, or those of their children, as an important element in the case managed intervention. They expressed gratitude for these opportunities for self-reflection, and did not, at the time of the interviews, describe these opportunities as attempts of control. Other service users were, however, critical of the level of assistance they received to help them understand their situation.

LAC users talked of the importance of the questions contained in the forms for stimulating their own thinking about their lives:

   In a way, when you put information down on paper you self reflect. It gives you an idea where you are at, makes you think about where you want to be. It is interesting to have your life down on paper and see yourself.

   While it was annoying filling [the AAR] out, going through it, I can see a bit of structure, look at things.

   To see where you are at, to see the reports you are receiving, the things that you could have assistance with, identifying where you need help and assistance. That’s good.

One mother described a fundamental change in her approach to parenting. She talked about her growth, the ability to get on ‘without a fella’, and how this occurred through the relationship with her worker:

   When I’d say something to her about something, she’d give me her opinion of it and I’d sit here and go, “yeah, maybe you’re right”.
Some parents who used SCARF also saw the assessment process as useful for reflecting on their children’s development. One mother said that she lost sight of her children’s needs because of her own drug use, and that she found the case managed intervention helped her focus on what was happening in the whole family:

I was just concerned about me, so it come as a shock to look at what was happening to the kids.

From a second mother:

Lots of things that came out of it, about the kids and all. Don’t get me wrong, it was very informative in the long run to me.

Some SCARF users employed the forms to envisage changes for the future:

I have talked to my support worker about not being on the income of Centrelink [Australian Government income support agency] no more … That’s my goal, to get a job and get my bills set up, get a house, buy my own house and the dream.

It was evident that aspirations to move out of poverty often sustained young mothers, and identifying this was an important part of the intervention.

Even though only a few service users commented on these issues in the study, these accounts indicate that, for some service users at least, the chance to reflect on the assessment domains presented an opportunity to understand their own circumstances. In contrast, a number of parents did not feel that they were adequately assisted with longer-term parenting. These parents described doubt that the intervention had helped them provide a safe and stable environment for their children, nor that it had helped with their own capacity to offer stimulation and warmth to their children.

Generally, service users did not describe workers as assisting them with longer-term change. One mother spoke of needing more help than she had received:

[With] feelings—to help me, like, with problems.
A small number expressed criticism of their social workers’ lack of specialised knowledge to bring about changes:

The actual worker [needs to have an] understanding [of drugs and alcohol] not just someone who knows everything about kids, but knows that [specialised] area, that one topic. [Parents need] someone that knows what they are talking about, they’re not just going to listen to someone just blabbering on.

Referral to specialised services (specified as an option in SCARF) did not appear to have occurred with sufficient frequency to meet service users’ needs for help with longer-term change.

5.3.5 Division over values underpinning case management

Whereas the previous section was concerned with the assistance offered in case managed intervention, this section turns to the issue of how control of behaviour was experienced by service users. This was an issue identified through the social work literature and text analysis as significant, but service users in this study did not describe concern about control of their behaviour that led them to withdraw from contact with the agency. Nevertheless, there were some areas where individual service users did hold different values from social workers. This led to conflict with workers in areas where agreement could not be achieved.

Generally, there were few descriptions of service users feeling controlled by workers or coerced into changing their behaviour. One LAC user commented:

I felt pretty in control.

Service users did not raise issues of privacy or confidentiality in relation to social workers or agencies - another indication that social control was a limited concern.

A few SCARF clients were exceptions and identified some social workers’ values as unacceptable. Some parents said they weren’t prepared to engage with particular workers, and in some instances, effectively resisted by approaching the welfare agency to have their worker removed from their case. Some tolerated particular social workers
in their lives only in a limited way. The reasons for rejecting individual workers were unclear. I was unable to elicit details about what stopped a trusting relationship from developing:

[Worker] is just a little bit more abrupt, I suppose you could say, a little bit less compassionate.

Like I couldn’t relate to [some workers] ... it’s just finding that one person.

Some SCARF service users objected to their social workers raising the issue of religion in the intervention. These social workers had raised the question of service users attending church. This is an interesting issue, as religious affinity is not a topic raised in SCARF (although, a social worker may have discussed the issue in connection to social networks, or perhaps raised the question of spirituality in relation to wellbeing, or perhaps these were the only camps available for these children). Some service users, however, objected strongly to what they saw as workers trying to impose religious values. The social work profession in Australia is secular (Ife, 1997), and such questions on religion are not to be expected. LAC service users did not raise the issue of workers’ values, and neither did they mention the issue of workers raising religion with them.

There were two main areas of value differences between service users and their social workers evident in SCARF-based interventions. One of these areas was physical punishment of children, an issue raised by a number of SCARF users:

Parents are losing their rights to discipline children ... from what I copped when I was a kid, compared to when my kids cop it, they’ve got it easy.

If I stop swearing, yelling or raising my voice in front of my children, they would wonder what the hell was the matter with me and it would panic them more. But [the worker] can’t quite understand that logic.

The second area in which service users and social workers had value differences related to questions about substance use. One participant said:
I don’t use drugs any more, but I’m not ready to give up my alcohol yet, I’m still young—I still want to go clubbing and I’m not ready to give that up yet.

A further issue potentially related to control by social workers could be expected in the area of depth of assessment, but here the findings are unclear. Some LAC users did comment about the thoroughness of the assessment process. Young people who had used the Assessment and Action Records (AARs) were very aware of the level of detail in LAC. Some appreciated it:

I was pretty surprised at how thorough it was in terms of how it addressed your schooling, it addressed your health, your physical, emotional [wellbeing], it has a pretty holistic approach.

Others responded with ambivalence:

[The AAR] is good because it’s specific but, I don’t know, sometimes specificity is a bit daunting for young people.

There were a number of young people for whom the detail of assessment of private life was seen as invasive and irrelevant to the welfare task:

_I don’t think picking your nose really has to do with anything._ Interviewer: Do you mean that they were too detailed? _Yeah ... The questions are alright; when_ they asked what happened before and do you like everyone now and stuff. I like those questions ‘cause they’re honest facts.

I really hate those forms [AARs]. I procrastinated, filling them out and, um, they really annoyed me. I understood what they were about. I found them, not invasive, just incredibly unnecessary, like a few of the questions ... like how many times I used marijuana this week. They get really nitty-gritty.

Even with these ambivalent comments, it is difficult to understand whether the young people resented attempts at control of their behaviour, or whether they felt frustration at the detail of the information collected, or annoyance at being probed on such personal
matters. There was indication of boredom and irritation arising from the difficulty of recalling information:

Like how long you have had the following drink in the last week. I couldn’t even remember how many times I had potatoes or fruit or vegetables over the last two days, let alone over the last week.

In addition, many described the LAC forms as repetitive:

Really repetitive—the same kind of pages, it’s not really made, I don’t believe, for children or teenagers.

Like they were always the same every time, once they had been answered once, they didn’t need to be answered again, ’cause they all asked the same thing.

These comments on value difference indicate that there were some areas where service users felt they were open to being controlled, but these were described as of limited concern as service users were able to resist. These issues did not cause the service users to withdraw from the intervention, although they may have caused others to leave. (This study’s participants were those who had continued with the intervention, and hence were at least prepared to put up with these values.) Nonetheless, service users were not powerless in dealing with differences in values, and this will be explored further in Chapter 7.

5.3.6 Differences over understandings of childhood

Service users had mixed reactions to how childhood was understood in LAC and SCARF interventions. Parents described views that were consistent with developmentalist concepts of childhood, but these were different from those held by the young people in this study, who gave accounts more consistent with the contribution of the new children’s paradigm.

Parents in both case management systems said they felt comfortable with the domains and values relating to children and young people:
[Assessment of children is] very realistic, absolutely realistic...

I like the questions in this [AAR] form.

Interviewer: Do you think the workers helped you understand what was happening with the kids? Service User: Absolutely.

SCARF parents felt the child development domains were valuable in helping them to understand their children. Some young people felt the assessment questions were relevant:

Assessment was fine, [my workers focused on] health and education, I was pretty independent, I had a pretty strong grab on my identity and family relationship, presentation and all that sort of stuff.

Neither LAC nor SCARF service users identified child development dimensions that they thought were missing from the case management systems. For example, Aboriginal parents did not talk about issues such as spirituality, attachment to ‘country’, or tribal group.

Some young people felt that the concepts of childhood underpinning LAC and SCARF raised problems for them. There were three areas they were concerned about: the definition of independence; standardised views about childhood experience; and; the failure of the systems to acknowledge differences in competencies. (This third issue is dealt with in the next chapter.)

One young woman in her early twenties spoke with bitterness at the lack of recognition of her difficulties coping independently at the age of eighteen, and described her inability to manage in the community at that age. She spoke of the problems she had experienced in living in unstable and unsafe housing, and said she had needed a much greater level of help than her workers assumed because of her age and legal status as ‘independent’:
All that happened to me, in every apartment I lived in, I got stalked or vandalised, abused or something, and in all those forms there was really nothing telling me what [to do] ...

The LAC form appeared to be premised on the view that, because she had reached the legal age of independence, she no longer had any need for support. This issue was not raised by the two other participants who lived independently.

Young people also reacted with amusement to workers’ understanding of their lives, such as overestimating their freedom or their drug use:

I just am not a big drug user, I don’t drink, it wasn’t that I felt I had anything to hide ... I was at Boarding School at the time and I used to think “I wish” ... These things don’t apply to me at all, they weren’t specific enough as well to my situation. They would say how often would you go out a week, well I’m in the care of a Catholic high school so obviously [these were not issues for me].

Young people felt that adult conceptions of their lives were stereotyped; including the above account in which workers assumed that drug use was common. Exclusion of young people because of the presumed authority of their parents is discussed in Chapter 7.
5.4. DISCUSSION: ACKNOWLEDGING THE COMPLEX GOALS OF CHILD WELFARE INTERVENTIONS

This study has shown LAC and SCARF to embody a complex mix of aims for social work interventions and childhood development. Examination of the social work literature indicated that it was highly polarised over whether case management was concerned with assistance or control. The LAC and SCARF forms contained textual elements which attempted to guarantee assistance and to identify norms for behaviour, however, service users had varied experiences, subject positions and subjugated knowledge of this. Childhood has been largely understood in developmental terms in LAC and SCARF, with some competing concepts from the new children’s paradigm. This hybrid view of childhood was not contested strongly by either social work academics in the literature or by parents.

All service users acknowledged the importance of assistance offered in the interventions. In both LAC and SCARF-based interventions, practical assistance was identified as the issue of greatest importance to service users. Emotional support from social workers was also described as important, and some service users recognised the growth of ‘insight’, which they directly attributed to the case management systems. This effect was noted in two other studies of service users (Kufelt et al., 2000; Kearns cited in Yeatman & Penglase, 2004), but not in other commentary on LAC and SCARF.

Despite the fact that the majority of service users expressed satisfaction, a small number of service users were unhappy with the limited assistance provided. SCARF service users also described limitations in social workers’ assessments of the role of poverty and wider family obligations, as well as problems with the quality and extent of some practical assistance. Some service users were also critical of the lack of interdisciplinary knowledge of their social workers, and the limited assistance that they received making longer term changes in their lives. These criticisms were also identified in Fernandez’s (2007a) study of Australian service users. Three service users withdrew from active engagement with workers, as they had very significant reservations of levels of assistance offered through LAC and SCARF. Firstly, two service users in stable
foster placements did not want the social and emotional support offered through LAC, and wished to restrict the intervention to the provision of financial assistance only. These two young people had considerable difficulty with the automatic assumption that LAC should be used simply because of their legal status, rather than acknowledging the long-term support that they received in their foster placement. The social work literature on LAC does not acknowledge this issue, and appears to accept uncritically the authority of social workers to impose the use of LAC. Secondly, assistance with parental capacity was not adequate in the case of one service user who used SCARF. This dissatisfaction may be accounted for by the tension between social workers’ child protection and family support roles, and noted by commentators on the Assessment Framework, on which SCARF is based. This indicates a conflict between offering support and controlling behaviour:

... whilst social workers ... have been encouraged to shift from a child protection to a child welfare orientation in their practice, such changes have been hampered by professional and organisational concern to manage risk (Spratt, 2001).

The issue of social control was not identified as a matter of concern to service users in this study, because they either felt comfortable with the values expressed or were able to resist social workers when the matter arose. (This finding must be considered with caution because participants were those still in contact with welfare agencies). None of the participants in this study cited behavioural control as a reason for rejecting the welfare agency’s intervention. This finding must be balanced with that fact that relationships with individual workers did sometimes fail, and also that this study had no access to those who had already ceased having contact with the welfare agency. Where there was conflict between service users’ views and those of social workers, outcomes varied: some service users adopted their social workers’ values, and others rejected them. This type of resolution is not discussed in the critical literature on case management.
In considering these findings, it is important to note that, in SCARF-based interventions, service users described unacceptable intrusion of workers’ values more often than when using LAC. SCARF service users commented on the differences between individual social workers’ values more frequently than LAC service users did, and SCARF users were more likely to report conflict with their workers.

The concept of childhood underpinning both LAC and SCARF appeared to be problematic for young people. With regard to LAC, some young people expressed concerns about the withdrawal of support after the age of eighteen. This is an issue described in other Australian child welfare literature (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004, 2006). There was also some concern expressed by young people about how their lives were understood by their social worker, but this did not lead to breakdowns in relationships between these service users and their social workers.

Overall, the findings of this study have resonance with some findings in the previous service user studies described in Chapter 2. Few of those studies have, however, described the broad range of responses found here. In relation to the LAC AARs, earlier studies found both young people and parents were positive about the aims of case management interventions (Kufeldt, et al., 2000). The development of insight through use of LAC and the Assessment Framework has also been noted (Kufeldt, et al., 2000; Millar & Corby, 2006). Ambivalence about the effective understanding of need was noted in relation to the Assessment Framework (Cleaver & Walker, 2004). Fernandez (2007a) has noted the importance of practical assistance, relationships with workers in the provision of social and emotional support, and also problems with the nature of assessment in some circumstances.

The social work literature on these case management systems did not, however, generally prove be a good guide to service users’ responses to LAC and SCARF. Critics did not identify the limitations revealed by service users’ dissatisfaction with assessment, or at least with the inadequate assistance sometimes provided after the assessment. Neither did they understand how much service users valued the role of assistance, nor the importance of workers’ provision of emotional support. Advocates of
LAC and SCARF did not acknowledge the role of social control in case managed interventions, and the potential for such control to be problematic to service users.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the aims of case managed child welfare interventions, and has shown that both assistance and control of behaviour are ‘statements’ evident in the LAC and SCARF forms, and in service users’ responses to the case managed interventions. The social work literature has not adequately reflected the mixed nature of these goals.

LAC and SCARF were designed as attempts to fundamentally change child welfare interventions, by emphasising assistance to service users. Differences over interpretation of aims were, however, the cause of three service users significantly restricting their engagement with their social workers. Even though the majority of service users described ultimately being satisfied with the aims of the intervention, if LAC and SCARF are to be developed to recognise service users’ ‘subject positions’ and ‘subjugated knowledge’, changes are required. Service users’ knowledge of poverty and extended family obligations would need to be better understood. Case management could be altered to maintain (or reinforce) a focus on parents’ needs, rather than focusing exclusively on children’s needs, and thus provide parents with greater support.

The issue of control in child welfare interventions will be discussed further in Chapter 7. At this point, however, it is important to note that many service users in this study did not describe strong objections to social control in case managed interventions. Service users did resist attempts to change their behaviour in relation to the physical punishment of children and substance use. Many would not engage with individual workers, or had particular workers removed from their case. Only a few reported changing their behaviour. Changes to LAC and SCARF may need to reflect these identified areas of concern.

Concepts of childhood utilised in LAC and SCARF have been shown to be a mix of developmentalism and the new children’s paradigm. There is considerable variation, however, in the way that service users interpreted these. Many young people would
welcome revision of these concepts. Social workers and parents appear to be accepting of the developmental concepts embodied in LAC and SCARF- a stark contrast to young peoples’ accounts. Approaches to childhood could be altered in the development of LAC and SCARF so that young people over the age of eighteen years would continue to be supported, and individuals were not included in case management solely because of their legal status. Further research will be needed to understand the views of younger children.
Chapter 6
Findings: The processes of LAC and SCARF-based interventions

This chapter continues to describe the study’s findings; in this case, on the processes designed into LAC and SCARF to bring about change in the lives of children, young people and their families. The processes explored are concerned with planning and the use of written text, and include: decision making and review procedures, time frames, and interagency collaboration. The following chapter (7) will consider a further important aspect of social work processes, that is, the attempts to alter power relations between service users and social workers to bring about change.

As in the previous chapter, my findings draw on the discourse analysis of three sets of texts. I begin the chapter with an analysis of the social work literature. This set of texts is not an adequate basis for discourse analysis, as it relates to the production of the texts and is affected by the exercise of power by social workers over what is published. Consequently, I focus on the LAC and SCARF forms. The third set of texts is my transcripts of interviews with service users. The order of this chapter does not imply that I privilege social workers’ views over service users; rather the social work literature and the LAC and SCARF texts provide an accessible starting point to identify discourses.

Analysis of the three sets of texts indicates that the design of processes is a significant element of case management systems but there were a wide-variety of interpretations as to their meaning and significance. Social work academic literature proved to be highly polarised over planning processes and the use of written text introduced through LAC and SCARF. Analysis of the texts showed that LAC and SCARF draw on techniques that are strongly associated with control of social workers. Service users did not identify the planning processes built into LAC and SCARF as significant. For the most part, service users did not describe these processes as problematic except in the case of reliance on written text.
6.1 SOCIAL WORK ACADEMIC DEBATE: PROFESSIONALISM AND MANAGERIALISM

As described in detail in Chapter 2, social work literature was strongly polarised over the planning processes introduced in LAC, the Assessment Framework and SCARF. Some commentators in the literature appreciated standardised planning based on consistent time frames, decision making and review protocols, and the use of written text (Cheers, Kufeldt, Klein & Rideout, 2007). Other writers have been critical of the processes in LAC and SCARF, seeing them as techniques to achieve managers’ objectives, or to lead to greater control over workers. As described in the previous chapter, this concern at worker control is sometimes conflated with concern over control of families (Garrett, 2003a). A number of social work academics of case management systems have been highly critical of the use of written text in controlling families and social workers (for example Bell, 1998-99, Knight and Caveney, 1998, Munro, 2001, Garrett, 2003b). Implementation studies of service users reinforced that concern (Kufeldt, 2000; Wheelaghan and Hill; 2000, Francis 2002). The authors and developers of LAC and SCARF having not acknowledged research findings that indicate that service users had problems with the forms. Similarly, critics have not addressed research that claimed that service users did appreciate aspect of the forms.

6.2 THE LAC AND SCARF FORMS: A ‘NEW’ APPROACH TO PLANNING

Analysing the textual features and discursive practices prescribed by LAC and SCARF forms provides understanding of the processes introduced by LAC and SCARF into the child welfare intervention. In this chapter, I focus particularly on the following features of the text (from the list described in Chapter 4):

- ‘interactional control’. These are the larger-scale organisational properties of the texts, the ways in which texts affect the function and control of the social
practice of planning in child welfare (Fairclough, 1992 p.234). Interactional control has implications for relationships between workers, service users and welfare agencies;

- ‘genre’. This is a way of interacting linguistically, which is important in regulating and controlling social actions. Fairclough (2003 p.66) claims that text is ‘likely to involve a combination of different genres’, and that ‘new genres develop through combinations of existing genres’;

- ‘intertextual chains’. These are the presence within a text of elements of other texts, and the links between these;

- the words and grammar used on the forms;

- ‘ethos’. That is the diverse features of the texts that go towards constructing the social identities of both workers and service users;

- ‘modality’. This is the affinity of the texts to the propositions that underpin them (in this case, degree of commitment to the child).

I also consider discursive practices of the production, distribution and consumption of the texts.

My analysis of the LAC and SCARF forms identifies the importance of active planning and planning processes involving time frames, structured information gathering, and interagency collaboration. It identifies issues such as: intra-agency communication; attempts to shape the relationship between workers and service users through individualised care planning; and, the institution of contact regimes between workers and service users. These issues are not raised, however, extensively in the social work literature or acknowledged by service users.
6.2.1 Time frames for information collection, decision making and contact

The designers of LAC and SCARF forms have attempted to impose time limits for information collection and decision making through schedules of questions to be completed within specified timetables (the forms and time frames are presented in Appendices 1 and 2). The individual sets of forms are inter-related, and contain instructions about the order in which they are to be used, and the timing in the intervention.

In LAC, the five preliminary forms specify in detail what information is required, and link this to decision making time frames. For example, the information to be collected prior to a child being placed with a carer is contained in the Essential Information Records, and the information required during a placement, in Placement Plans 1 and 2. SCARF contains a similarly related set of forms linked to specified time frames. As described in Chapter 2, in redesigning the Assessment Framework based largely on workers’ requirements, the developers of SCARF attempted to introduce two flexible lateral planning processes, which allow workers either to focus on immediate action or to move to complete assessment.

In both case management systems, the forms have established timetables for contact between their social workers and service users (the ‘joint animators’ of the forms), by specifying the times by which the forms need to be completed. In LAC, there are specific instructions about timing on the forms. In the LAC Reviews of Arrangements, the minimum timing of contacts between workers and service users is: within a month, at four months, and then within ten months from the time of entry to out of home care. AARs and Reviews of Arrangements are then completed within ten months, and subsequently at six monthly intervals for children under five, and annually for older children. Timing is always recorded. For example, ‘Review of Arrangements: Question 2’ provides spaces to record information on up to 12 visits: they must all be dated, and there is provision for recording who was seen by the worker, including specifically whether the child was seen alone (an attempt to give children the opportunity to speak without adult interference). In SCARF, instructions related to assessment also attempt to
prescribe worker/service user contact over a specified period. There is, however, more flexibility for workers and service users as only a maximum time-limit is set for the ‘Action Plan’. Nevertheless, SCARF’s Action Plans contain instructions specifying the time in which these plans must be completed:

Regardless of the order, the worker should aim to complete the assessment within 5 weeks  (SCARF Child and Family Assessment General Guidance, page 2).

6.2.2 The importance of review and compliance

The designers of LAC and SCARF forms have also attempted to establish planning through ongoing review of the decisions made, at specified times; to institute checks of social workers; and to encourage service users’ compliance with decisions. The texts ‘establish’ processes for review, and check accountability for actions and the distribution of the forms aims - to reinforce compliance of these strategies. The forms also specify the venues within which workers must review decisions, and the particular people to be involved.

The forms include a schedule for review. The LAC ‘Review of Arrangements’ form focuses on workers’ compliance with past decisions. It begins with the practice note:

At a minimum requirement each child/young person’s circumstances must be reviewed within four weeks of coming into care, and then again four months after commencement of the placement (that is, three months after the first review). Subsequent reviews should occur at intervals of no more than six months (p.1).

Individual forms refer back to previous forms to ensure that information is checked and updated for care planning meetings. For example:

Please ensure that the Care Plan, Essential Information and Placement Agreement are available at the review, together with a copy of the last review form (LAC Review of Arrangements form, p. 1).
SCARF also contains Review Records, and there are instructions about when review meetings should be carried out, albeit with no specific time frames:

The SCARF system recommends that routine Review meetings must be held regularly to record progress made by families. A Review may be held for one of the following specific reasons:

- The current plan is complex and involves other services.
- Significant changes in the family circumstances have been observed or reported.
- Planned outcomes are not being achieved.
- Change of worker or service circumstances.
- Closure is occurring and a final evaluation is required. (Review Records)

LAC also contains specific questions that check that workers have undertaken the tasks identified in previous care planning meetings, thus making compliance with decisions highly transparent. For example, the LAC AAR ends with a ‘Summary of Work to be Undertaken’ (related to each domain of a child’s functioning). This summary requires completion of the following questions:

- Work required, the person responsible, the target date, the date completed and a summary of the decisions about actions that are desirable but cannot happen yet (LAC Assessment and Action Records, final page).

Both LAC and SCARF forms aim to institute discursive practices to ensure reviews of decision making and compliance. In this way, opportunities are opened up for service users to check reviews and to identify expectations. These reviews are distributed internally in agencies, to service users, and to a range of specified agencies. The purpose of this strategy is to create a situation in which workers’ actions are transparent, not only to their managers within the agency, but also to workers in other agencies and to service
users. Such distribution allows service users and other workers to check compliance, both immediately and over the longer term.

There are differences in the ways that LAC and SCARF institute review and compliance regimes. SCARF forms are less prescriptive of the tasks to be performed. Social workers who complete the forms are required to fill in a tick-box to record whether planned outcomes were achieved, and to assess these in relation to need and the situation of the child (see SCARF Review Record). LAC, however, has a highly prescriptive way of identifying what workers need to do, and specifying when and how this should occur.

6.2.3 Shaping planning between agencies

LAC and SCARF forms are designed to identify the agencies involved in planning for a young person’s welfare and specify the relationships between them. Questions aim to identify those agencies, (and the individuals from those agencies), expected to be involved in the intervention, making provision for checking their participation, and recording agreement with any decisions taken.

Completing the LAC forms requires the identification of all the agencies involved with the child (for example, Questions 20–22 on the LAC Essential Information Records, Part 1). Involvement in decision making is recorded here by naming the agencies and individuals expected to attend meetings. The summary sheets at the back of the AARs specify which agency is responsible for each identified task. The statutory worker for a child is required to sign LAC Reviews of Arrangements (Question 28). Instructions for distribution of the texts also attempt to encourage opportunities for collaboration between agencies. A further important element of LAC is that it can be a basis for information for government and funding bodies, and thus provides financial accountability for the work undertaken by the agency. In some States, governments have sponsored the use of the system and have access to these records.

SCARF forms also require that workers involved in ‘animating’ the forms specify the relationships of welfare agencies working with the family. Referral sources are identified (Referral Record), other agencies’ involvement in meetings is recorded and onward referrals noted. The distribution of forms is not specified.
There appear to be differences in the way each system approaches interagency collaboration with LAC attempting tighter control. In SCARF, these provisions for recording attendance are less stringent than LAC, which requires the signatures of third parties, verifying that they understand plans.

6.2.4 Planning within welfare agencies

LAC and SCARF forms have been designed to have an impact on the relationships between workers within a welfare agency. The forms are distributed throughout an agency and are not just the property of the worker. Thus, the data recorded is open to examination by people other than the particular case social worker in the agencies. This potentially affects relationships between workers and managers, and among workers themselves. Managers must have access to the forms to supervise and monitor work, and this means that the number of visits and their content are readily open to review. Signatures of supervisors are often required on the forms as well (for example, SCARF Review Record, page 6). Workers’ relationships to other workers are also potentially affected. The standardisation of the forms means that data are readily available to individuals who were not involved in originally producing the texts, and there is ready distribution of the forms among workers.

6.2.5 Individualised interventions

The most immediately striking feature of the LAC and SCARF forms is that they relate to an individual child, and attempt to focus the intervention away from family or sibling groups. There is one set of forms for each named child (Chapter 2 describes some modification of these arrangements in SCARF). This attempt at controlling the focus of the intervention is highly significant, as traditional child welfare practice frequently meant that children were treated as part of a sibling group (and hence possibly had their individual needs overlooked), or were only spoken for by their parents (Parton, 2004).

6.2.6 Shaping the interactions of workers and service users

LAC and SCARF forms have been designed to have a significant impact on shaping the nature of the relationship between service users and social workers. The genre, ethos, word and grammar choices in LAC and SCARF are particularly important. LAC and
SCARF constitute mixed genres: although the forms are predominantly bureaucratic, there are also elements of legal contracts and counselling interviews within the text.

The bureaucratic genre is evident in the requirement for comprehensive documentation of every stage of the interaction in standardised format. SCARF, for example, includes Referral Records, Reports to Child Protection Authorities, Assessment Summaries, Records of Contact, Closure Records, and New Information Records. This bureaucratic genre contributes to shaping a hierarchical relationship between workers and service users, and establishing workers as part of a wider network of social institutions to which they are accountable.

The forms include elements of the genre of legal contracts. Workers and service users must sign the forms in various places, thus committing themselves to take responsibility for certain tasks. There are a number of such agreements between workers and service users. SCARF’s ‘Child and Family Assessment Agreement’, for example, has many points at which both workers and service users need to ‘sign off’ documents. LAC requires the signatures of the representatives of the organisations who have participated in the decision making meetings, thus formalising worker-to-worker and worker-to-service-user relations. These contractual features give the appearance of equality to the relationship between worker and service user. Once again, this feature links the texts to wider social agencies and confers legitimacy on the intervention.

The bureaucratic and legalistic features of the forms are supplemented by a counselling genre. Both LAC and SCARF include questions that require the individual service user’s narration of extensive personal information and considerable details about intimate aspects of their lives. The Consultation Papers provide the clearest example. They are directed to young people, carers and parents, and contain questions about their experiences, requiring them to describe aspects of their lives over the previous 6–10 months.

Features of the text are important in establishing the identities of social workers. Fairclough (1992) draws attention to the overall ethos of texts in constructing the ‘identity’ of participants. In the LAC and SCARF forms workers are positioned as part
of a wider system to which they are accountable through the extensive use of guidance notes and provisions for review. The appearance on each form of the logos of the owners and licensees of the systems also reinforces organisational dominance over social workers.

One of the most significant features of the texts for the interactions between service users and workers relates to the language used in the forms. This has significant implications for social workers and service users who would be expected to have significant differences in literacy competency. There is only one version of the LAC and SCARF forms, and that assumes an adult level of education and literacy. For example, the vocabulary is sophisticated: both young children and adult service users are expected to understand words like ‘carbohydrates, bulgar wheat, proteins’ (Assessment and Action Records concerning diet p.9). Additionally, the size of the forms requires a level of comfort with written text. Some LAC AAR forms are fifty-nine pages long (Age Fifteen and Over). The Consultation Papers are less reliant on complex words and are shorter; they also have small though plain illustrations. These elements of the text have implications for service users’ sense of competency and their capacity to negotiate with workers.

This analysis of genre, ethos, words and grammar shows a number of contradictory features of the text in relation to the interactions between workers and service users. There are elements of hierarchy reinforced by the language used but also elements of equality and reduction of worker autonomy. The structuring of power relations between social workers and service users are considered further in the following chapter.

6.2.7 Implications of the use of written texts

LAC and SCARF have significantly increased the use of written text in child welfare interventions, and this has implications for social practices. Fairclough (1992) points to the importance of understanding discourses through texts (both spoken and written) by seeing the text as part of an ‘intertextual chain’, that is, drawing on previous texts that may bring rich associations for the individuals using the forms. In this section, I describe
ways in which LAC and SCARF draw on intertextual associations of bureaucratic forms to shape the relationship between service users and social workers.

LAC and SCARF are visually highly bureaucratic: they have small print, are densely written, their questions are numbered, and the forms are sober and plain (only Consultation Papers are illustrated). The forms are thick and large. They have muted color coding for ease of retrieval. Tick-boxes are frequently used, which limits the number of responses expected from the animator of the text. The forms are typical of the forms used in Australian bureaucracies such as Centrelink and the Australian Tax Office.

For workers, forms such as LAC and SCARF may be identified as part of a tradition of file-keeping and data-gathering strongly associated with management in social work agencies, and hence with control of workers and service users. Written records in welfare services have been found as far back as 1531, when Henry VIII ordered local authorities to keep the names of the aged and the poor (part of this record being kept locally and part being sent to central government for monitoring of the services provided) (Steyaert, 1997). Subsequent record-keeping was most likely based on books used to record service users’ complaints. By the 1920s the use of files for monitoring complaints had changed as social workers were increasingly influenced by psychoanalysis; recording came to be seen as ‘process records’ used to check interpretation of interviews. There is evidence of long-held concern about written text in social work practice, with file-keeping being strongly resisted and contested by some social workers (Steyaert, 1997). For example, a 1992 study found that three-quarters of the social workers interviewed questioned the accuracy of the information recorded on service users, and expressed dissatisfaction that such a large amount of material needed to be recorded (Steyaert, 1997). Social workers have consistently raised questions about record-keeping because of concerns about accuracy, integrity, relative costs and benefits, low utilisation, limited capacity for interpretation and threats to privacy (Steyaert, 1997). Written records can distort assessment. For example, Swift (1995, p.56) describes records of child neglect in which, rather than professional judgment:
An actuality is worked up to conform to and represent requirements of the setting.

Some social workers have also expressed concern that the need to complete forms fixes interpretation and demands concrete responses which subsequently becomes static (Garrett, 2003a p.9). These associations of past record-keeping practices are likely to bear on social workers’ interpretation of LAC and SCARF (described by Fairclough as ‘members’ resources’ (1992)).

Service users may also have strong associations with the bureaucratic nature of the forms. LAC and SCARF may be similarly identified as part of a tradition of bureaucratic file-keeping. Service users may be involved with a number of bureaucracies, (such as income maintenance and health agencies), in which written text is primarily for organisational purposes and hence depersonalising in impact. Service users may not even feel they have a right to see what is written about them, and hence may associate LAC and SCARF forms with the kinds of situations that have reinforced organisational power. Given the likelihood that children, young people and their parents may have low literacy levels and poor educational experiences, the forms may also arouse anxiety.

This analysis of LAC and SCARF forms show the systems to have significant implications for the planning of child welfare interventions.

6.3 SERVICE USERS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF RELATIONSHIP

This section explores service users’ positioning on the discourse identified above through social workers’ literature on LAC and SCARF and analysis of the texts themselves. To investigate service users’ experiences of the planning processes of case managed interventions, I asked children, young people and their parents about what led to changes for them arising from child welfare interventions. I asked about contact with workers, the importance of knowing their workers, time frames, review processes,
worker reliability and relations with other agencies. To assess the impact of the texts, I asked about their experiences of using the LAC and SCARF forms.

As in the previous chapter, the unreferenced text in italics below is taken from the transcripts of service user interviews. In describing the findings I consider groups of service users’ responses (such as young people or parents), explore comments on LAC separately from comments on SCARF and compare the systems in the conclusion of each section.

6.3.1 The central importance of contact and individualised relationships

When asked what processes helped them, the majority of SCARF and LAC service users identified contact and the nature of their relationship with their workers. Many mothers who used SCARF spoke of the importance of the workers:

I couldn’t have got on without them.

[Named worker] is my mainstay.

Young people using LAC shared these views:

Like just interaction with somebody who seemed to care about what I wanted to tell them. For me to understand that someone wanted to understand—like—my life and where I was, and what I was doing.

An individual relationship with someone with whom service users had regular contact and was familiar with them was important:

I can sit down with my caseworker and explain to her any problems and she’ll just give me a hand to get around them problems, especially [named worker] she’s good.

I liked [named worker]. She was always there if I needed her. You could tell her an issue you were having and she would act fast instead of leaving it till the last
Parents who had children in care described the ongoing importance of contact with social workers in their lives despite the trauma of losing their children, and frequent disagreement over their workers’ actions. Two parents, who had children in long-term, permanent placements, spoke about continuing involvement with workers over many years. Two other parents, who had had children restored, described their contact with workers as significant in enabling children to return to their care.

The majority of service users in this study had significant relationships with their workers who were constant and central in their lives. Regular contact was a foundation for these relationships.

### 6.3.2 Factors contributing to service users’ relationships with social workers: Empathy and reliability

While ongoing contact was clearly a pre-requisite to relationship development between workers and service users, the issue of what made these contacts positive was less clear. When asked about the factors that led to relationships developing, service users generally attributed this to the personal qualities of the workers; it was not clear from their accounts what role planning processes had in engendering relationships. Service users also described trusting their workers as being an important part of a positive relationship. Both young people and parents spoke about trust as being a measure of how they related to workers:

> It’s how you get on with them trust-wise.

Trust was a concept particularly drawn on by Indigenous parents and the co-researcher (also an Indigenous person). The development of trust may be related to satisfactory resolution of power relations and will be discussed further in the following chapter.
In families using SCARF, empathy was also commonly referred to in positive relationships with social workers. Service users often assumed that workers had lived through similar situations to themselves:

They care, 'cause they have been in the positions like we’ve been in, they’ve been struggling mothers, that’s the good thing about it, they’ve been there.

Empathy may be related to the appropriateness and depth of assessment, described in this and the previous chapter, but service users did not appear to relate this to the case management systems.

Among the planning processes that service users identified as important for positive working relationships were reliability and the timeliness of responses. Some service users directly linked this with the case management systems. One young person identified the role the forms played:

Yes they follow through. [LAC] designates the responsibility for your care, it designates people to help you ... because it’s on paper I guess that you could go back and look it up and say you got the support you were promised to receive.

Reliability was also important for the SCARF users, and many commented on this valued attribute of workers without relating this to the case management system:

I never had to wait for them to do anything; they’d always be on to it, and that sort of thing.

If they’ve said something, they did it.

They are helpful, and if they can’t get that help, they get someone who will help, get information or things like that. They are reliable, reliable people.

Working with [named agency]: if they’ve said something, they did it.

If they can’t do it they tell me. They ring me in a couple of days and say they can’t do that.
Young people using LAC similarly identified workers’ reliability as a strong element in positive working relationships:

*No, she always kept her promise ... she said that I am going to make sure that you stay here and be happy and she did.*

I remember with health I needed to get my teeth checked, that was the work required, there was a date for that, so that was a clear structured thing that needed to be addressed, and that was.

Despite the frequency of these comments, reliability was not a universal experience. One young person, who described a good overall working relationship, was critical of her worker:

*Ages ago, like when I first met [named worker], she said that she would help get me cooking lessons when I’m 16, and now I’m 20 and I haven’t seen a cooking lesson and I still don’t know how to cook ...*

A LAC user described a mixed experience in a service with high worker-turnover:

*We’ve had good and bad workers, some have stuck to their word and some haven’t.*

One SCARF user commented:

*No that one thing ... They used to say they’d take the kids on trips ... they never did, parks and that ... they never seemed to offer it.*

*No ... I think I’m the one to bring it up before anything gets done ...*

In sum, service users understood what assisted them in terms of a ‘holistic’ relationship; however, they did not necessarily link these characteristics with case management. While positive relationships with workers may begin with appropriate assessment of the need for assistance and an egalitarian approach to power relations, service users did not describe it in these terms. Nor did they identify planning processes as a significant part
of their relationship with the workers, even though it may have assisted the worker to be more reliable. It is therefore not possible to make judgments on the connection between planning processes and positive relationships. It was also apparent that service users’ experiences were variable and that the case management systems did not necessarily obtain reliability from workers.

6.3.3 Little concept of time limited decision making and collaboration

I asked children, young people and parents specifically about time-limited information gathering, decision making, and the co-ordination of services. Few service users commented on the importance of time frames for planning. Only one SCARF service user commented positively:

They are straight to the point, that’s what I liked.

This directness however was not always appreciated:

[Workers should] not be so full on, maybe you should wait a month or something to ask [questions].

‘Cause when you get to know someone a bit more, then you can [communicate]. Some parents might be too scared to say anything, kind of thing.

LAC users did not mention the importance of timely decisions.

Similarly, few service users responded to questions about the importance of interagency collaboration. Specific questions on the relationships between welfare agencies did not elicit comment.

Service users did, however, comment negatively about the transition of plans from one worker to another, within the same agency:

Changing over workers I’ve been quite frustrated ... I rang up [agency] and spoke to a lady and said to her “[my ex-worker] had previously told me if I ever needed any help with prescription drugs that yous were more than happy to
"help", and she basically laughed at me on the phone and said they weren’t prepared to help me.

Interagency communication was of little interest to service users-a contrast to the importance given to it by the authors of these systems.

### 6.3.4 Variable experiences of written text

The use of written text in the intervention was problematic for many service users. It affected their ability to produce, distribute and consume or interpret text.

Before examining service users’ comments, it should be acknowledged that there was a wide range of exposure to and understanding of the forms. Workers were responsible for the initiation of the use of the LAC and SCARF forms, and it was clear from the interviews that they used the texts in a wide variety of ways. Parents who had used SCARF were generally not aware of written records, even though the forms required their signatures. Only a few service users recalled signing or being given copies of forms, but it is unclear whether this was because the forms were not completed, whether service users saw the forms as not worth acknowledging, or whether they simply did not remember them. Young people whose families used SCARF were similarly not aware of the forms. In contrast, LAC service users were very familiar with AARs and Consultation Papers. Nevertheless, even when the forms were familiar, the study’s findings indicate that a range of practices were employed with service users. In some situations, young people who sat down with the workers and ploughed through the AARs in one sitting described the process as: ‘Boring—it went on for like hours’. Other young people were given the forms for completion independently. In these latter situations, accounts of their use indicate that they were often completed at the last minute, with little attention to detail.

#### 6.3.4.1 Variable response to written text

LAC and SCARF both require the active engagement of service users in producing the texts, that is, they are co-animators of the text, completing pre-authored forms (Fairclough 1992). This activity was significant for many service users.
Some young people were appreciative of the written text:

_The whole AAR is important; the detail; because I wouldn’t have spoken to people, definitely I wouldn’t have spoken to [the agency] or the carer about drugs, alcohol, where I want to be going, how my health was going—all that sort of stuff; and, although it’s daunting in its presentation, like, it is essential I think._

I like the consistency, like how they come out every year, as you do change every year.

A mother commented that her initial response to the forms had changed as she got to know their purpose:

_I didn’t really know what they are about … I would probably have felt better if they’d been explained. At first, I thought that it would be like (the statutory authority) but it wasn’t._

Young people who had been actively involved in co-animation of AARs, however, often made comments that reinforced critics’ concerns that the format was a barrier to their participation:

_I can appreciate the value of them, and that, but I thought there could be an easier way to actually, like we are doing now, to actually sit down and talk to one another… it gives me more incentive to have someone actually listening to me._

_Filling in a form was something you feel more distant doing … I dunno it sort of takes away any connection or emotion and for someone at a young age, about 15, 16, then maybe the importance of the information they are putting down on the paper is withdrawn because they feel that they see that as filling out a form._

_I don’t think [filling in forms] would have made it more impersonal for me; it would have just kept it on the same level._
I am two sided on it, I think [that] someone not as confident and direct as I am would find the forms really good to express themselves, what they hope to achieve in the future ... I didn’t need a form every year to do that, I had a really good communication with my social worker so she knew what was going on with me.

The majority of young people who used LAC described a clear preference for face-to-face communication:

Our sole purpose was to go and pick up this toaster, but while we’re going to do that there will be small talk along the way. I’ll start to reveal something, and she’ll just mention something, and I’ll elaborate on something which I definitely wouldn’t have said if she picked me up and knew that we were just going somewhere where she would just get an understanding of how I am feeling.

Like you can’t gain someone’s trust in a situation when the person knows you’re just there because you want to know how it’s going, want to know about them. You sort of think “well it’s your job to be asking me this so—do you care? Does it even matter? Why should I tell you?” sort of thing. I think that when I really started to let my guard down and develop a good relationship with my worker was definitely through situations where that was the exact opposite of what she was trying to achieve, which is pretty absurd when you think about it.

Yeah but I am the type of person who’s always worked better ... talking. I don’t learn from paper. I know that I’m not the only person who learns off vocal and a lot of people these days are vocal, not reading. Even a cassette, DVD player or something, even a person saying the questionnaire on a DVD or something, but with a trendy beat in the background that you listen to.

Service users who had used the LAC forms directly were highly conscious of their size and the effort involved in completing them. A number of young people were put off by the size:
I found because of its size and, I dunno ... I just thought it was a lot of ticking boxes and getting through it as quick as possible ... yes the weight of it just, you get a bit overwhelmed when you pick it up.

_This sounds really lazy ... Just having the bother—they give you this lumpy form that you don’t really care about and you fill it out, and you have to drag it to the post office and put it in the box, and you know how the handbag won’t take a big envelope, so it just gets left there and collects dust..._

I remember filling a big one out, a big thick one.

Although it is unclear whether it was the level of detail, the structuring, or the depth of intrusion in the AARs that was problematic for young people, this problem seems to have been better addressed in the LAC ‘Consultation Papers’:

_The good thing about the Consultation Papers is that it is you fill it out and it’s broad, at least it gives you the independent opportunity to sort of address what you want to address._

_It was excellent, it was up-to-date detail with what was happening now ... like you’re a teenager and circumstances are constantly changing._

_Some young people, however, even found the Consultation Papers onerous. Reflecting on his attitude as a fifteen-year-old, a young man complained:_

_I think [Consultation Papers] came as well, for the review and, with my situation, a lot of it was, “what has gone well for you since the last review?” like, well “I went on a school camp”. “What has not gone well for you?”—I dunno, maybe “I failed an English exam or something”, um, I dunno I felt like I was a bit too old for it—I thought it was more for a younger age._

_When asked how the forms’ format could be changed to increase their engagement, young people highlighted the need for a youth-friendly format:_
I just think maybe it could be presented in a better way, something like this, [pointing to the research booklet in Appendix 6]; it would be a lot better, a lot more successful.

Another young person called for:

Like pictures or cartoons, even a bunch of cartoons to make it amusing.

One participant who had been unable to convey important information about his unhappiness felt a scale would have been useful:

If there was something like that I would have put a 5 out of ten, borderline ... the way I feel in this placement is 1 or 2, but maybe that would get the carer in trouble or me in trouble, so I’ll, just put down a 5 ’cause that’s not really good or bad and they won’t know.

The AARs came in for the most criticism:

Have them more direct, less repetitive questions, more specific too. I guess they can’t generate a form that’s personalised, but something modeled on the [Consultation] forms.

Two of the three parents whose children lived in foster care remembered the LAC forms, but none reported finding them onerous. Only one of these parents had keep copies. No parent using LAC commented on the use of Consultation Papers, and it was unclear to what extent they had been used.

Problems in understanding the forms because of literacy were not raised specifically. There were nevertheless, indications that literacy could be an issue for some service users:

---

In the case of the paperwork for this research, all the interviewees appeared to be able to manage the simple forms concerned with research permission, and only a few children asked for clarification of words in the research booklet.
You feel like you can connect more [with an Aboriginal worker], and they talk to your level of English. Not the big words. Huge words I can’t even say them. Just talk to pppp, what’s that word [Interviewer: Professionals?] yeah, and I don’t understand.

I know when I see a whole bunch of papers, a whole lot of writing like papers and stuff; I just freak at the first sentence and then throw the rest away kind of thing. [I] don’t really read it because I don’t like reading, kind of thing: as I said, my generation’s not reading, they’re more visual, they need a lot of things coming towards them, they can’t sit and concentrate, I know a lot of young people, who are like been through the refuges and stuff, I think the reason they have so much trouble in like school and stuff, is that it’s like all books. All black and white, and like kids these days don’t learn off black and white, they need colour, they need to be stimulated.

Service users who knew the forms expressed appreciation of their purpose, but were largely put off by their genre, size and literacy requirements. They preferred face-to-face communication.

6.3.4.2 Emotional response to the distribution of text

The way that the texts were distributed drew little critical comment from service users. They did not see the distribution of written records among welfare agencies as problematic, and seemed to have little awareness of how the forms were used by welfare agencies. The only area of concern that was described related to privacy within families.

Distribution of documents to service users was valued by a few participants:

\[I\] didn’t know what I needed them for, but I liked getting them.

Others appreciated them because distribution had allowed correction of material:

Actually mistakes are pretty common because of the changes in workers that get muddled up and, yeah, they made lots of mistakes ... One time they said I had tinea when we never said anything about tinea. I don’t have tinea and um stuff
like that—random things. Apparently I had [ironic laugh]—they just make things up.

One young man was embarrassed at the response that he had made as a fourteen-year-old, because of his misunderstanding about how the form would be used:

I think [the question that I completed] was about STDs [sexually transmitted disease] or drugs or something, just ’cause I was curious and it was, I think it was, perceived to be like maybe there was a problem or something.

He was embarrassed because this led to subsequent questioning in a case review.

Service users raised the problem of distribution of documents among family members. One mother described the distress attached to recording information about the severe abuse that she had inflicted when her child was two years old:

I thought nope, this has got to stop. I can’t have that bit about them there because I don’t want him to read about it, like the broken leg and all that stuff. The carer said he did read that stuff, the form, and the papers and got upset ...
Stop putting it in the paper, enough is enough ...

What service users said did not reflect the concern in the literature about privacy. Instead, they raised issues that were not acknowledged by their social workers—that social workers made mistakes, and that there were the problems of privacy within families (not among agencies).

6.3.4.3 Missed opportunities for the interpretation of texts

Features of the LAC and SCARF forms appeared to discourage service users from actively using the forms. LAC users described seeing the forms as predominantly belonging to the organisation rather than being personal documents:

I didn’t really understand when I first filled it out [LAC]; I didn’t have a clue that it was going to be important to me. Like, I seriously thought that I was just
filling in like some booklet for someone who needed some information for something. I wasn’t even processing that it was for myself.

I never kept one [LAC form] at home, I guess I felt it was more for the agency.

For a personal document, it’s very clinical and sterile.

The LAC forms were seen as indistinguishable from the many forms that young people had experienced elsewhere in their life in care:

I’ve been in the system for, like, since I was ten or something. There were so many forms and they are just so repetitive. Like every form is pretty much the same, the same questions. I’m just sick of filling in forms ...

Service users did not see the advantage of keeping LAC and SCARF forms. A number of participants did keep records, such as records of Court decisions, but most did not want to keep child welfare forms. A number of adult respondents talked of ritual ‘purging’ of the records. A mother who had lost care of her children commented:

I threw things out that I didn’t want to read again.

I don’t like keeping them in my house where other people can read them. I don’t think it’s very nice, plus I had them there for too long, I think it was time for me to get rid of it because um ... I did go up a few times and read it but it caused pain and I didn’t want to go through that.

Many didn’t want to keep copies because of the traumas caused by re-awakening distressing memories. When asked to speculate about whether they would have wanted to retain copies of their forms, SCARF mothers who recognised the forms said that they found the memories of difficult times unsettling:

Like I said it would drag up too many memories that I don’t want to remember.

There’s going to be more bad stuff than good stuff in it, so I’d prefer not to know about it, kind of thing. But maybe when more good stuff goes in it I’d like to ...
Young people in SCARF similarly described being confronted by other written records of their lives, in this case family law documents:

I sort of was [interested in keeping my file] but as I read my family history I sort of wasn’t ... There were some mad things happened in my family’s history so, yeah ... I just threw it away.

Maintaining a physical copy of the papers was also practically difficult. Younger people seemed to find keeping the paperwork problematic, with few knowing where their records were. Many described losing track of them because of house moves.

The interpretation and consumption of the texts appeared to be highly problematic for service users, and no participants described them as valuable. As in the experience of production of texts, there were substantial barriers to service users interpreting the forms.

6.4 DISCUSSION: PLANNING, WRITTEN TEXT AND RELATIONSHIP

This discussion explores planning, and the specific use of written text in these processes introduced by LAC and SCARF to bring about change in the lives of children, young people and their parents. These case management systems have been among the most highly contested issues in academic literature on LAC and the Assessment Framework, with claims that they are both highly professional and counterclaims of their role in promoting managerialism. I compare the intent of their authors and the commentary of social worker academics with service users’ views and the analysis of the forms above.

The most important aspect of the ‘processes’ identified by service users was a positive relationship with their worker. Despite critics’ concerns that case management systems might empty out the social work relationship (Garrett, 2003a), relationships with workers were clearly possible in LAC and SCARF-based interventions. Regular contact with workers, reliability, empathy and trust were possible in case managed interventions. It is of interest that the findings of this study contrast with other
Australian research that did not use case management systems, in which children and young people did not know their workers’ names, did not have plans, and were not seen regularly (Gilbertson & Barber, 2004 as described in Chapter 1). Particularly interesting in this study is the ongoing involvement of parents with children in care, and their descriptions of influencing decisions in relation to their children, which is in contrast to recent research of mothers excluded from involvement when their children were in care (Klease, 2008).

It remains unclear from this study whether there is a causal relationship between these positive factors and the planning processes designed into case management systems. Service users seemed only to identify the personal qualities of workers as important, and it is unclear whether this was entirely independent from changes introduced by the case management systems, or whether there were separate issues to be considered. The only attribute that some service users directly identified with the case management system was reliability, but it is unclear whether this was solely the result of using LAC or SCARF (for example it may be a reflection of a professional approach to work). While some of the attributes valued by service users may have been designed by the authors of the systems, (such as the reliability of review processes), service users did not describe that association. Level of contact and individualised interventions were appreciated, but not linked to case management.

Service users also did not recognise the importance of time frames for information collection and decision making, intra-agency co-ordination, review, and compliance. They did not identify interagency collaboration as significant to relationship development. Once again, this may not mean these factors were not important determinants of a positive relationship, merely that they were not recognised as such. Further research on these associations is needed, perhaps comparing social workers’ actions in interventions with or without case management.

What can be said is that social work planning processes (identified through the textual analysis of case management systems) did not appear to stop the development of constructive relationships with social workers or the welfare agency, either for adults or
young people. Service users did not see time limits or interagency communications as factors interfering with relationship development. Although some service users did object to the slowness of interventions, this did not appear to cause a breakdown of the relationship.

The major exception to this finding was the barrier attributed to written text. The LAC and SCARF forms clearly presented problems for some service users although, as already noted, this also did not lead to a breakdown of the relationship. Not all service users’ comments about written text were negative and, by the time of the interviews, many LAC users appreciated the use of forms for the insight it gave them, and for the ability to check information. Poor record keeping has been shown to be a significant problem in child welfare. Young people report not understanding their own history (Community Services Commission, 2000) particularly in out of home care where they may experience multiple placement changes (Community Services Commission, 2000). Furthermore mistakes and inaccuracies have ‘…contributed to flawed decision making, particularly in the area of safeguarding children…’ (Taylor, 2008 p.29)

Written texts were problematic in genre, size and literacy requirements, and the strong emotional responses evoked. This was similar to research by Francis (2002) and Wise (2003) on LAC. Overall, service users had a preference for more engaging formats and a more acceptable genre, as mirrored in the concern of critics. Distribution of the texts also created difficulties for service users, although not in the ways anticipated in the social work literature on LAC and SCARF. Rather than concerns about interagency breaches in confidentiality, service users were concerned about the distribution of forms to other family members. Neither advocates nor critics in the social work literature identified such concerns about privacy, or the highly emotional nature of the texts for many service users.

Significantly, there were many service users who did not recognise the SCARF forms, indicating that there may be other problems with the forms that were not mentioned in the interviews. It is unclear why service users did not recognise the forms, whether it
was because workers controlled initiation of the forms, or whether the forms were not meaningful. Further research is needed in this area.

Service users appeared not to recognise the planning processes designed into LAC and SCARF as factors leading to positive working relationships. Having difficulties with the planning processes did not lead to service users describing interventions as poor (unlike responses to the aims of the intervention described in the previous chapter). They did however see written text as a barrier to participation.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered the construction of planning processes and the use of written text in LAC and SCARF. Planning has been the most highly contested issue within the social work literature on case management systems. It has resulted in highly polarised positions among social work academics. These positions are strongly correlated with divisions in the literature over the purpose of the interventions: critics concerned with case management as a form of social control have strongly objected to those processes, which they associate with managerialism and the control of families.

If LAC and SCARF are to be developed to reflect service users’ positioning and subjugated knowledge, then further research will be needed to explore the impact of planning, as it was not possible to make a direct connection with the attributes associated with a positive relationship, and features of the case management systems. In redevelopment of LAC and SCARF, those features which could contribute to what service users see as desirable, should be maintained. These features include: reliability, regular contact between service users and social workers (to the level where there was good knowledge of the child or young person), and those factors which contribute to an empathetic response and trustful relationships. Maintaining these characteristics in the future development of LAC and SCARF, does not seem to be problematic, as good working relationships did develop under the current systems.

Significant problems with the use of written text for service users do need to be addressed in redevelopment of LAC and SCARF. Although some service users
appreciated aspects of written text, the nature of that text and the recording process require significant alteration to satisfy service users. Forms need to be less bureaucratic and to use a more acceptable genre to service users. Features need to be found to assist service users to identify with the written text. The distribution of documents, particularly in the area of intra-family communication, needs to be better addressed. Attention is also needed to the emotional associations of written text, and to the difficulties service users have in maintaining copies of forms. To design LAC and SCARF forms to be ‘user-friendly’ would require attention to colour, attractiveness and illustrations, and would need to appeal to a range of literacy competencies. Further research would also be desirable to understand the reasons why social workers have used written forms in the way that they have, that is, sometimes not completing them in the presence of service users.

Developers of LAC and SCARF also need to consider findings that indicate that the case management systems did not appear to guarantee the reliability of social workers. In both LAC and SCARF-based interventions, interviewees described the reliability of some workers as poor. Moreover, internal agency co-ordination was also sometimes poor in SCARF-based interventions, where the transfer of service users from one worker to another did not always go smoothly.
Chapter 7
Findings: Power relations in LAC and SCARF-based interventions

This chapter describes the way in which power relations between service users and social workers have been shaped and experienced in case managed interventions. Alterations of power relations are one of the strategies that the authors of LAC and SCARF have used to bring about change in the lives of children, young people and parents. Because of their significance, power relationships are dealt with in a separate chapter to the processes (of planning and recording) discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter reports on how LAC and SCARF embody wider social tendencies towards ‘democratisation’ (Fairclough, 1992), that is, the way that LAC and SCARF alter inequalities and asymmetries in prestige within and between people. The authors of LAC and SCARF have attempted to alter these inequalities through reconstruction of power relations to give service users greater opportunity to exercise power in the welfare intervention, and limit social workers’ power. In this study, I was particularly interested in exploring: the levels of power deemed appropriate for service users and workers, the purpose of changes in power relationships, and the categories of people who were included in participatory strategies.

As in the previous two chapters, I began my analysis by examining the social work literature, and then, the LAC and SCARF forms. I used these analyses as the basis for formulating questions for semi-structured interviews with service users. As in the previous chapters, the order of the discussion did not imply that I privileged social workers’ views over service users; rather, that social workers’ commentary and the forms themselves provided a starting point to identify the subjugated voices of service users.
In this chapter, I argue that interventions based on LAC and SCARF do open opportunities for service users to exercise power and, to an extent, limit social workers’ autonomy. Nevertheless, examination of the LAC and SCARF forms show them to be complex; with some elements of the texts contradicting attempts to increase participation. Social workers in the literature on LAC and SCARF appear to accept trends towards greater democratisation, and are relatively uncritical of attempts to increase service users’ participation. These commentators do not object to the level of service user participation, despite their arguments elsewhere, that case management systems increase control over families (governmentality was discussed in Chapter 3). Nor do these commentators object to threats to social workers’ autonomy in the debate on participation (despite their concerns about managerialism described in Chapter 6).

My findings on service users’ experiences indicate that children, young people and parents did not describe power relations in child welfare interventions in the ways in which the authors of the systems envisaged. Although the majority of service users described positive experiences, negotiations often involved conflict, took time, and were influenced by power relations ‘external’ to the intervention. The ‘productive’ use of power was poorly acknowledged. These findings on service users’ experiences challenge the ‘hierarchical models’ of power used by the authors of the systems. These models of power, current in social work thinking at the time (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001), identified levels of power sharing in which power was a commodity, capable of being bestowed on people. I argue that redevelopment of LAC and SCARF may be better based on Foucault’s theory of power, as a network of negotiation. LAC and SCARF therefore need to reflect the complexity of negotiations, and the impact of power relations external to the intervention.

7.1 SOCIAL WORK ACADEMIC DEBATE: PARTICIPATION AND RESISTANCE

Examination of the social work literature in Chapter 2 showed that the authors attempted to achieve greater service user participation in LAC and SCARF and that this attempt has been relatively uncontested, even by social workers generally critical of LAC and
SCARF. The literature describes the authors of LAC as aiming for a partnership between workers and service users, although they did not aim for equal sharing of power (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996; Tolley, 2005b). The authors of LAC and SCARF specified the involvement of particular adults and children, with the goal of better informing the intervention. By implication, this meant that other groups of people were excluded from these strategies, and had limited opportunities for participation.

Social work critics in the literature on LAC and SCARF have not contested the principle of greater service user participation, but have focused on two concerns. Firstly, they were concerned by a failure to have service users participating in the development of the systems, and they viewed this lack of consultation as hypocritical, and an indication of a lack of commitment to participatory principles (Garrett, 2003a). Secondly, there was concern that the underpinning concepts of childhood in LAC restricted participation by children (Garrett 2003a; Winter 2006). These critics did not write about the exclusion of some other categories of individuals who may have an argument for participation.

The question of how social workers’ power might be affected by an alteration of service users’ power was also absent from the social work literature. This is interesting, as it contrasts with the vigorous debate over the general threat to social workers posed by the case management systems. As described in Chapter 6, critics of case management systems (Garrett, 2003b; Houston 2002) have been concerned by managerial control of social workers. The absence of debate in the literature over any competition between social workers and service users may show the dominance of the discourse of democratisation in child welfare practice.

### 7.2 THE LAC AND SCARF FORMS: MANIPULATING OPPORTUNITIES TO EXERCISE POWER

As a way of exploring power relations in LAC and SCARF-based interventions, I analysed, the textual features and discursive practices of the forms comprising these case management systems.
In undertaking this analysis, I was particularly concerned with:

- the ways in which texts are distributed to create greater accountability of workers to other social workers and service users, as well as opportunities for consumption of the texts by service users;
- the social matrix of the discourse or ‘social and hegemonic relations’ (Fairclough, 1992 p.237) and the ‘orders of discourse’ the text draws upon;
- the choice of words and grammar;
- the bureaucratic genre of the texts; and
- the ethos of the texts (that is, the diverse features that go towards constructing service users’ and social workers’ concepts of self).

In my analysis of the LAC and SCARF forms, I have employed the ‘hierarchical’ views of power prevalent in social work literature at the time of the development of these systems (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001). This view assumes that power is a commodity capable of being bestowed and withdrawn, and that there are distinct levels of power that can be shared, from tokenism: in which there is no real capacity to experience power, to the opportunity to be heard, or to be involved in decision making.

### 7.2.1 Opportunities for service users to be heard

Many of the questions in the LAC and SCARF forms open opportunities for service users to express and record their views, although the two systems vary considerably in relation to the specific individuals to whom these opportunities are extended. Furthermore, features of the text also have the effect of closing off opportunities for participation.

LAC includes many questions to elicit service users’ views, and the completion of the forms requires detailed information from the child, the young person or their parent. For example:
Does the child/young person have a positive relationship with everyone in the placement, including other children/young people? Please give details (LAC Review of Arrangements Question 14).

Some instructions for answering questions are addressed specifically to young people to encourage their direct involvement. For example:

This form is meant to help you, your case worker and carers to answer these questions ... you may be able to fill in a lot of the Record yourself. You will need to talk about your answers with your caseworker and/or one of your carers. (LAC Assessment and Action Records from the age of ten years)

Features of LAC offer service users the opportunity for direct involvement in developing narratives about their situations. Although criticised for their ‘tick-box’ format (Knight & Caveney, 1998), these questions seek to elicit verbal descriptions in the service users’ own words.

SCARF includes questions that specifically call for service users to participate, but not as extensively as in LAC. The SCARF forms are designed to provide space for service users’ comments. For example, the ‘Assessment Summary’ requires the ‘Main Carer, Other Carer and Child/Young Person’ to make comments and respond to a tick-box format that specifies whether they ‘Agree, Disagree or Partly Agree’ with the comments written on the forms by the workers. The SCARF ‘Assessment Agreement’ and ‘Planning Agreement’ both require the signatures of family members indicating that they agree with the statements on the form (three spaces are allocated for signatures). SCARF is significantly different from LAC in that it does not include questions directly addressed to children.

Both LAC and SCARF forms include questions to specifically identify impediments to service users’ participation. LAC includes such practical questions as:

Does the child/young person understand English? (LAC Essential Information Record Part 1 Question 8a).
If the child/young person uses a form of communication other than speech ... please specify (LAC Essential Information Record Part 1 Question 8b).

The LAC forms also contain questions on language skills and asking about parents’ communication ability. These questions are not replicated in the same detail in SCARF, although the Referral Record has a question on whether an interpreter is needed.

In LAC, Consultation Papers also provide a significant text-based opportunity for service users to participate. These forms are specifically designed to elicit the views of parents, and of children and young people in longer-term care, prior to the formal review meetings. These forms, ‘Consultation Paper for a Child or Young Person in Care’, and ‘Consultation Paper for a Parent/Person with Parental Responsibility’ are to be filled in separately by children and by parents, and are meant to determine these service users’ satisfaction with planning. These Consultation Papers have a less bureaucratic format than the other LAC and SCARF forms: they are shorter, they pose more open questions, they have illustrations, and they are smaller in size (they are A4 pages folded in half to form a booklet). Consultation Papers are not, however, available to all categories of service users, such as younger children, or other categories of individuals (like tribal elders or grandparents).

SCARF forms contain fewer text-based features to develop service users’ participation than LAC. There are no Consultation Papers in SCARF. Parents can be involved in filling in the ‘Children and Family Assessment’ forms, but it is not compulsory and their signatures are not required. Moreover, service users do not have to be given a copy of the form, although whether or not they have received it is noted in the Closure Record (thus clearly acknowledging workers’ discretion in this area). Instructions about children’s participation are also less prescriptive than those in LAC. Again, this is left to the discretion of workers:

When children are old enough to take part in the assessment, the worker will encourage and help them to do so (Child and Family Assessment Agreement).
A further important feature of LAC and SCARF forms that contributed to developing an opportunity to participate, is the way that the forms are directed to the individual named children (who are the primary focus of the intervention) rather than to their parents or siblings. LAC does provide opportunities for other significant people to participate, but it leaves inclusion to workers’ discretion. The Essential Information Records, for example, require the identification of significant adults other than the mother and father (in Question 18):

Which agencies, relatives and other interested people have been consulted concerning the child/young person’s situation and the formulation of a care plan (Care Plan Question 8).

But the strategy is not reinforced elsewhere in the texts with specific questions. The SCARF ‘Referral Record’ similarly requires the identification of ‘Other adults significant to the child’ (Page 7), but does not specifically include these individuals in participatory strategies.

While many features of the text open opportunities to be heard, these are mixed in scope. Furthermore, they are sometimes contradicted by the bureaucratic genre of the texts, which implies a more hierarchical relationship.

7.2.2 Opportunities for service users to be involved in decision making

The authors of LAC and SCARF have attempted to provide opportunities for some specified service users to be directly engaged in decision making venues such as care planning meetings. This is a level of participation that theorists see as more intense power-sharing than social workers merely listening to service users (Shier, 2001). Instructions on the forms require workers to record service users’ attendance at meetings, and to regularly monitor processes, record agreements, and collect signatures to verify attendance.
Within LAC, service users are required to formally approve case decisions by signing the forms, and social workers are required to record service users’ dissent (if this occurs) when plans are made or reviewed:

This plan has been discussed with child/young person, mother, and father, others with parental responsibility (Care Plan Question 20).

Please give details if any of those listed in response to question 20 above disagree with any of the provisions of the plan (Care Plan Question 22).

These text strategies are reinforced by discursive practices, such as requiring service users to sign the LAC form, thus making them ‘co-animators’ in the production of the texts. Furthermore, the need to regularly complete LAC AARs and the Consultation Plans means that service users have continuing opportunities to be involved in decision making.

In SCARF, service users are also included in decision making venues. For example, the ‘Review Record’ is to be completed following the regular review meetings, and requires service users’ signatures (provision is made for three peoples’ signatures). Service users’ signatures are also required on the ‘Closure’ form. There are no instructions related to signatures either on the individual ‘Child and Family Assessment’ forms, or on the ‘Report to Child Protection Authority’. Giving service users copies of the completed forms, along with the record of whether this has been done, reinforces attempts to include service users in decision making venues.

7.2.3 Restricting social workers’ opportunities to exercise power
The LAC and SCARF forms not only contain provisions to increase opportunities for service users to be heard and involved in decision making, but they restrict social workers’ opportunities to exercise power in the intervention. They introduce the ‘external expert’ as a reference point for assessment and decisions, and attempts are made to manipulate social workers to comply with these instructions.
The forms contain instructions for social workers to record and account for their actions following review processes. In LAC there are summary sheets at the end of AARs; in SCARF, the Review of Record, (Page 3), contains provisions for assessing the extent to which goals have been achieved. Social workers are also required to record the reasons why service users did not attend meetings, thus making any failure by social workers to invite service users to participate more transparent. For example, the SCARF Review of Record requests a list of ‘Persons attending review’ and ‘Comments re attendance’ (Page 2). Social workers are also to confirm the distribution of documents to service users:

Completed copies of Issues for Discussion, Record of Discussion and Review Decisions should be sent to named individuals from services, as well as family, worker and managers for signatures (SCARF Review Record, Page 6).

Please confirm that copies of this plan have been sent to all those invited to sign at Question 20 above (tick box) (LAC Care Plan Question 26).

Furthermore, completion of the questions requires that social workers record situations in which service users disagree with their social workers. For example, in Care Plan Question 20, the child, mother, father, and others with parental responsibility have their agreement or disagreement noted. Service users must sign the forms, which are then distributed to other agencies or managers (the phrasing of this question clearly indicates that social workers are not obliged to follow service users’ wishes, simply to document dissent should this occur).

Other features of the texts reinforce the limits on social workers in the intervention. Both LAC and SCARF forms contain instructions addressed specifically to workers, which attempt to shape their actions. Guidance Notes are used on most pages of the LAC and SCARF forms to create an external ‘expert’ reference for their work. Guidance Notes specify the detail of tasks that workers need to address to complete the forms. For example:
A range of blood tests and other examinations are recommended during pregnancy to monitor the health and development of the foetus (unborn child). Prolonged morning sickness and back pain should be checked by GP or specialist (SCARF Children and Family Assessment. Domain A: Child/Young person’s development. Age Group: Unborn).

The instructions for joint animation of texts imposes further accountability, and constructs the identity of the worker as someone who is accountable to their agency and who requires oversight when exercising professional judgment. Other issues, described in Chapter 6, which affect the relationship between service users and workers also have implications for workers’ autonomy (such as the attempt to enforce individualised planning, review and compliance procedures, and the contractual nature of the relationship between service users and social workers).

7.2.4 Conflicting statements on power relations

Although elements of the LAC and SCARF forms enhance service users’ participation and restrict social workers’ opportunities to exercise power in the intervention, there are other features of the texts that conflict with this goal. Firstly, social workers have control over the production of the texts, that is, social workers initiate use of the LAC and SCARF forms with service users, and the ways the forms are employed in the intervention is at the discretion of social workers. This feature reinforces social workers’ capacity to exercise power. Secondly, service users’ participation is limited in that the forms are available at only one level of literacy (that is, there is only one set of wording and only one layout). The forms have been written at a level that may discourage participation by less-literate service users such as children, young people with disturbed family backgrounds, parents who are poor, or social workers with low literacy levels. Finally, the highly bureaucratic genre is likely to further discourage service users’ participation, particularly given the strong associations of the texts with other bureaucratic forms (explored in the previous chapter).
The overall outcome of text-based attempts to open opportunities for the exercise of service users’ power and restrict social workers’ power can be best understood through the experience of service users.

**7.3 SERVICE USERS’ COMPLEX EXPERIENCES OF POWER RELATIONS**

I asked service users whether they felt included in decision making, and about their sense of who ultimately exercised power in the intervention. I was particularly interested in establishing whether service users felt they had accurately informed their social worker—this was, after all, the primary goal of the authors of LAC and SCARF in facilitating a sharing of power. Service users described a wide range of experiences of power relations. As in the previous two chapters, text in italics below is taken from transcripts of interviews with service users.

### 7.3.1 A sense of being listened to

The majority of the service users in this study spoke of being able to negotiate satisfactorily with their social worker; they described being satisfied with the ways in which they were listened to, and with the extent of their participation in decision making. Many referred to ‘trust’ in descriptions of positive relationships with social workers, which implies that service users believed that workers could be relied on to respect their point of view, and act on it reliably.

Most parents using SCARF spoke of being comfortable in raising issues with their social workers, and said they felt supported in their need to speak. A sole parent described this relationship as follows:

> It’s hard to find someone to listen like that.

Similarly, many of the young people using LAC described being listened to and clearly did not feel coerced by workers:

> I was never made to feel uncomfortable [in care planning meetings]. They are very good the way they ask those questions. Very politically correct, I never felt
ambushed or prodded into saying things I didn’t want to, or exposed or vulnerable in that situation. They were people who influenced my life, sure there were things I was embarrassed about, but I suppose you do have to ask for that support, and you have to open up if you want to receive that support.

This young person felt supported in decision making venues despite some elements of discomfort: A twenty-year old, who had spent long periods in care using LAC, reflected on her adolescence:

_ I never felt like I had a problem that it was dismissed ... I felt pretty in control there was never any thing they wanted to do that I objected to._

Young people recounted situations in which they felt that their views had been acted upon, such as, telling social workers about bad experiences with foster carers and having their placement changed. Parents of young people in care reported being listened to when they complained. One mother for example, did not want psychotropic drugs used when her son was in foster care.

**7.3.2 Service users’ exercise of power**

Despite these positive accounts of participation, there were accounts of considerable resistance during interventions, with many service users refusing to engage with particular workers. In addition, both children/young people and parents spoke of complex relationships, which took time to develop, and in which they controlled information flow, and sometimes came into conflict with their social workers.

Many service users took time to decide to participate, or were cautious about what they divulged:

_I think they should do [SCARF forms] a couple of times, because the more you get to know someone the more the truth you can say. Probably the first time someone does it, it won’t be all true anyway._

Controlling the flow of information and level of engagement enabled service users to exercise considerable power within welfare interventions. LAC users described
choosing to withhold information and deciding when, or even if, they would give information to social workers. SCARF parents recounted instances of deciding how honest to be with social workers:

*Everyone knows ... the boundaries to go to speak to the worker.*

Young people using LAC also discussed controlling what information they divulged. Many reported feeling reluctant to respond to questions in LAC (even when they ultimately described a positive experience of participation):

*When it came down to it, if I didn’t like something in the forms, if I felt something was a bit too personal or something I’d just lie.*

It took a long time for me to open up to workers. When I moved into independent living it was a bit easier as well because I felt a big load off my shoulders, I felt that I could be myself. I felt like I was hiding sort of thing when I was living in care.

Like, I wasn't very honest with [the form]. Like, ’cause I was ashamed of being like depressed or whatever.

In some situations there were active clashes between service users and social workers, in which service users actively exercised power in the intervention. Sometimes this led to overt conflict:

*I keep telling them ... the worker and I had a few arguments about that; I was uncomfortable with it; we had huge big battles over that and she come to apologise.*

Service users also described strategies to resist individual workers. A number of parents using SCARF spoke of refusing to interact with particular social workers. Service users often differentiated between their relationship with the agency and their relationship with the individual worker, and there were two examples of service users negotiating with the agency to have social workers removed from a family case. Service users
appeared sophisticated in their understandings of how to continue a relationship with the agency under these circumstances:

A: Yes, it did break confidentiality. [Worker] done it twice to my friend and my sister, [and I complained to the agency].

Q: Did you want to change worker?

A: No I just wanted her not to do that ’cause I knew there was a shortage [of workers] and I needed help back then.

Even those who described very positive participatory experiences talked about preferences for particular social workers over others. It is interesting to note in these examples that service users could differentiate between the attitudes of individual workers, despite the standardisation ‘imposed’ by the case management systems.

Despite overall satisfactory accounts of power relations, the intervention appears to be a situation that involved conflictual negotiations, which were often most difficult in the beginning of the intervention.

7.3.3 The impact of external power

It appeared that, despite the opportunities for service users to participate by answering questions posed, there were factors external to the case managed intervention which held service users back from being able to answer these questions. Many service users described social constraints on their ability to speak openly to their social workers. This is evident in the account of one young man, interviewed four years after leaving care, who described a very unhappy foster placement. He had not raised issues with social workers, despite actively using the Consultation Papers and AARs:

*I just ticked yes, if I was ever asked ‘how’s it going’ I’d be like fine, it’s fine, I had a place to sleep, I had food, it’s fine. But it was, sort of, the answers that I’d give were really empty. I’ve got what I need, when you come from somewhere really bad and you go into, like my experience, you come to [a welfare agency], you’re lucky to be where you are ... you don’t go and complain.*
This young man subsequently revealed his extreme unhappiness in his foster placement when he became independent. Answers such as this indicate that young people in care acknowledged their dependency on adults, given their social circumstances, and that this prevented them from raising issues that were problematic to them.

Young people and parents were also very aware of legal constraints when answering questions on the LAC and SCARF forms. Questions on drug and alcohol use were singled out for particular mention, with many service users stating that it was counter-productive to include these questions, as the questions were alienating and created barriers to communication because of their naivety. All groups of participants expressed suspicion of promises of confidentiality, particularly in relation to crime, fearing that they might lose agency support or become enmeshed in the criminal justice system.

7.3.4 Deferring to social workers

Some service users said that they ultimately ‘gave in’ to their social worker in negotiations, even where they disagreed over an issue and there was an opportunity on the LAC and SCARF forms to record this disagreement. In these situations, service users trusted their social worker to make judgements and decisions, and did not record their dissent. These situations were often characterised by a strong relationship involving emotional support from their social worker:

*She’s like the pot of gold* at the end of the rainbow.

The sun shines out of her fair arse.

One mother who used SCARF gave a graphic description of deferring to her social worker during child protection negotiations:

One thing I really liked about her was that if I was going overboard, like we went to a [child protection] meeting and I got quite angry and got upset and walked out, she was ... very firm with me, made me see what I was doing was really wrong. It was making it worse for me ... That’s one thing I really liked about her was that I could handle her honesty.
Many service users described social workers exercising power which they resented at the time, but which they were grateful for in retrospect, and they remained engaged with their social worker:

She always gives me a good kick up the arse when I need it ... she’s the only one that can get away with it, yeah, she’s the only one.

I didn’t want to go to detox, they put me in rehab and I wasn’t happy at the time with it, but sometimes they just tell you they are going to do it.

It’s usually for a good reason if they do that, yeah, and ... she always tells me the answer [as to why she acted in this way].

One mother who had lost her children to the care system spoke of considerable confrontation with the social worker:

I resent it but I agree with her. I tell her, constantly I’m only doing it for the kids, doesn’t mean that I have to like it ... it’s sort of like, the devil and the deep blue sea.

This woman was ambivalent about the advice of her social worker, but acquiesced because she trusted the social worker in the negotiation.

The phenomenon of service users ‘giving in’ to workers can also be seen in discussions over the ‘signing off’ of the LAC and SCARF forms, a strategy intended by the authors of case management systems to encourage participation. Service users did not appear to take the opportunity to exercise the power offered:

I probably signed it, but I just sign my name usually ... they just tell me about it and I sign.

They explain to you about what you’re signing first. Yeah. I don’t usually read the whole lot.
They’ll read it to me before I sign it, to know my point of view, my rights and wrongs and then I’ll sign away.

I sign that many papers from [the agency] I honestly couldn’t tell you which person they came from ... I won’t sign anything without trusting [a worker].

One young woman described being upset by signing the forms even though she continued to do so:

That’s the big thing whenever I have to fill out forms, I fill them out, but I really don’t know where they are going, or who they are going to or why I’m filling them out, and why people want to know private information about me, kind of thing.

The reasons why some relationships reached a point where service users were prepared to defer to their social worker are not clear from this research. But it is important to note that some participants implied that they had little power to choose whether or not to trust social workers:

When you get dependent on a big charity like that and you’ve got a family, you’ve got to rely on people so I’ve got a lot of trust in them, a lot of trust, if you didn’t have trust you’d have nothing really.

These examples show that the opportunities for service users to exercise power were not necessarily taken up, nor were attempts of the authors of LAC and SCARF to restrict workers’ exercise of power always successful.

7.3.5 The breakdown of negotiation between social workers and service users

As discussed in Chapter 5, there were some situations in which negotiations over the aims of the intervention were not satisfactorily resolved (service users did not defer to, resist, or satisfactorily negotiate with their workers). These service users exercised power by withdrawing from their engagement with workers, and refusing to discuss issues raised by social workers with them. In three situations, service users described
ignoring their social workers’ attempts at completing the LAC or SCARF forms, or avoiding conversations with their workers, because these service users felt they could not influence the intervention.

In two of these situations, young people did not want their social workers involved in their lives as it made them feel that they were ‘not normal’, and they only wanted contact with social workers in order to get financial assistance for their carers. The social workers still attempted to complete LAC however this made the young people angry. Both these service users lived in a State in which it was not possible for a carer to have legal parental responsibility, (and hence avoid review by social workers), and continue to receive financial support from the welfare agency. In contrast, two fifteen-year-old adoptees in the study lived in another State where post-adoption financial assistance was available. These adoptees had been able to stop seeing social workers and using LAC once they were adopted, and were very positive about their previous use of LAC.

In the third situation, a young mother who used SCARF was unable to negotiate the emotional support required to meet her emotional and social needs. She claimed that social workers appeared to have turned their attention to the children’s needs rather than her own, and she was very frustrated over her inability to negotiate the level of support that she required. She therefore refused to discuss issues with workers, and described feeling hostile to both the workers and the SCARF system. In each of these three situations, the participants described exercising power by reducing their interaction with their social workers.

7.3.6 Exclusion of children and young people from participatory strategies

Among the participants in this research, there were a number of SCARF service users who consistently reported feeling excluded from participating in the intervention. One young woman said she was not given the opportunity to speak, and she didn’t have adequate involvement in decision making processes:
[I was] just trying to deal with it myself ... Just crying a lot I guess, ... we [worker and I] didn’t talk heaps probably just a couple of times, like more just talking about easy things, not going into the detail about what happened, the stuff I was worrying about.

This young woman was extremely unhappy with the way her family’s problems were resolved, and felt that she was unable to burden her mother with her problems. When the family had eventually been re-housed, this young woman was angry and extremely unhappy with the location of their new home and her quality of life, and she described feeling depressed. Workers appeared to have left this young woman out of the participatory strategies available to her, through the forms. In this case, workers appeared to only ask parents about what they felt was happening and how solutions would work for the family. This girl’s mother was also part of the study, and did not describe the same frustrations over having her own views heard.

Other young people in families that used SCARF also described similar feelings of being relatively isolated from social workers who were interacting with their parent. They were often at school when social workers visited. A number accepted this exclusion from decision making because of the urgency of the family crisis, but they often described feeling that they could have made a contribution, and were sometimes similarly unhappy with the decisions made without their consultation.

It is important to note that I was not able to talk to children younger than ten about their participation or their preferred involvement in either LAC or SCARF-based interventions (a condition of ethics approval from UWSHREC). Further research is needed about what these younger children felt about their involvement in interventions.

7.4 DISCUSSION: A NEW A CONCEPT OF POWER FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

In this discussion, I compare service users’ experiences of power relations to the goals of participation described in the literature on LAC and SCARF and to my analysis of the texts. The findings of this study indicate a wide range of experiences of power relations
among children, young people and parents when using LAC and SCARF. There were accounts of changes in service users’ experiences during the interventions, service users who did not take up opportunities to participate that they were offered and social workers who exercised power in ways not anticipated by the authors of the systems. While many service users described positive experiences of their participation in case managed interventions, the findings indicate that the LAC and SCARF forms had a less significant impact on power relations than that envisaged by the systems’ authors.

Analysis of the findings of this study indicates that LAC and SCARF forms appeared inadequate to achieve their authors’ intentions of informing social workers in three ways. Firstly, the LAC and SCARF forms did not control the way that social workers or service users exercised power in the intervention. Secondly, the authors of LAC and SCARF did not anticipate the ‘productive’ use of power in child welfare interventions in which service users deferred to their workers, and did not want to record differences. Thirdly, the questions posed in the case managed intervention did not overcome the effects of external power relations, and these questions were not answered openly. These findings call into question the adequacy of the concept of power relations embodied in the LAC and SCARF forms, and are discussed in greater detail below.

It must be noted that previous service user studies described in Chapter 2 do not report the range of experiences identified in this study, and there is one study in which findings were contradictory to these findings. A few of the implementation studies described in Chapter 2 found limited increases in service users’ participation compared with pre-LAC practice (Kufeldt et al., 2000; Wheelaghan & Hill, 2000). Furthermore, a study of managers’ views confirmed an increase in opportunities to participate (Thomas, 2005). In contrast, a study by Wise (2003b) found some evidence that young people were reluctant to divulge sensitive information when using LAC. One difference between this study and the research by Fernandez (2007) was that young people in the earlier study reported that young people participated actively in the intervention. In contrast, this study described young people as feeling excluded from interventions. The reason for this difference is unclear. It may be that in the Fernandez study, young people were reluctant to criticise workers while the family was still receiving assistance, or it may be
that my study of completed interventions relied too heavily on memory. Further research is needed to resolve this discrepancy.

7.4.1 The impact of written text on power relations

Although it is not possible to entirely distinguish the impact of text from the many other factors affecting case managed interventions, it appears likely that written text did affect participatory practice. Participation certainly did appear to be possible in case managed interventions, despite initial criticism of LAC. The extent to which the text affected participation can be deduced from the differences between participatory experiences of service users who used the detailed provisions of LAC, and the experiences of service users who used the less detailed provisions of SCARF.

The majority of service users in this study considered that, by the time of the post-intervention interviews, they had been listened to, supported in expressing their views, and had their views taken into account. Young people using LAC described attempts by workers to give them opportunities for participation, (despite two participants not taking these up), and they were familiar with the specifically designed Consultation Papers, with their requirements to record young people’s views. Other studies confirm the participation of young people using LAC: for example, managers have reported engaging children more actively (Thomas, 2005), and young people have reported increased involvement (Kufelt et al., 2000). Most SCARF users also felt listened to; however, there was greater conflict in these relationships, and more frequent rejection of individual workers than in LAC-based interventions.

There were differences between the experiences of service users using LAC and those using SCARF. These differences may, at least in part, be a reflection of the stronger textual controls in LAC when compared with the less formalised approach taken in SCARF. LAC forms have greater specificity in their questions, and incorporate the additional text of ‘Consultation Papers’ for parents or young people. LAC forms also attempt to place greater restrictions on social workers’ opportunities to exercise power, evident from the greater use of text features that constrain social workers, and the consistent requirements for service users’ signatures, indicating their consent (or their
recorded dissent) regarding the planned intervention. In contrast, SCARF does not contain consultation tools, has less prescriptive questions, and does not specify an age at which children must be involved in decision making (although it does suggest that young people over eight years of age are included). SCARF documents are less complex for service users to use and require fewer literacy skills, and they are thus at least potentially more inclusive of service users. This evidence for the impact of text on participation is suggestive of the importance of text, but it is not conclusive, as there may be other explanations for the different descriptions of power relations, such as greater acceptance of social workers’ power on behalf of children and parents.

Despite these positive descriptions, participation in the case managed intervention seemed a more complex process than the simple opening up of opportunities for service users’ involvement, and service users taking these up. Some service users took a long time to participate, and there was considerable conflict in negotiations. The authors’ aspirations for better informed decision making also seem to fall short. Service users were able to exercise power in ways different from those assumed in the hierarchical model, in which increasing levels of power were offered to, and taken up by service users (such as implied by child welfare theorists at the time of development of LAC who based their concepts on Arnstein (1969). For example, if service users did not like the values of the social workers, they resisted these opportunities to be involved by controlling the flow and accuracy of information, or sought to have workers removed from their cases. Furthermore, where social workers attempted to control behaviour such as physical punishment of children, there was a range of ‘resolutions’, from ongoing resistance on the part of parents, to compliance.

Social workers also appeared to exercise power outside of the ways that were anticipated by the case management systems. This was particularly the case in SCARF-based interventions. For example, social workers sometimes disagreed with some service users’ positions, and undertook actions despite service users’ opposition. Certain workers were able to influence the intervention more strongly than others, despite the use of a standardised system.
It appears that the negotiations between service users and social workers occurred very differently from the assumptions in the texts about how power would be exercised. The wide variety of experiences of power relations, and the conflicts involved in interventions indicate that a simple hierarchical concept of power does not adequately explain power relations in child welfare interventions. Foucault's (1990) view of power, as continually negotiated appears to better represent what was happening in service users' descriptions of their experiences. In Foucault's view, all participants are capable of exercising power—a phenomenon that seems apparent in the descriptions in this study.

### 7.4.2 The productive use of power

One of the findings most difficult to explain when using a hierarchical model of power was when service users ignored offers to exercise power, and ‘deferred’ to the social worker. Interestingly, this was often in the context of emotional attachment to the worker. In addition, social workers appeared to alter their views, for example, with the apology to a service user over the social worker’s use of particular religious camp for respite care of children. These situations indicate that change was often negotiated and the intervention productive.

Workers’ power did not appear to be exercised in ways that were only repressive, even though there were a number of situations in which service users changed their views because of what they described as the influence of their social workers. Service users did not seem to describe being oppressed, even when they disagreed with their social workers.

Foucault’s view of power appears to explain the phenomenon of workers and service users negotiating a resolution. Such situations as service users described may well be understood by drawing on Foucault’s view that power is not only repressive but productive. Healy (1998 p.907) describes this as ‘the complex and potentially productive operation of power in child protection contexts’ This process has been described in other applications of Foucault’s ideas in social work literature, in which it has been observed that service users:
agree to particular kind of work upon themselves ...[following] struggles, as the old “naturalness” is abandoned for a new one (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999 p.68).

The implication of this finding is that power relations must be considered as dynamic in child welfare interventions. This affirms Healy’s view that:

participatory practice in child protection requires not a refusal of worker power but rather an ongoing assessment of the operation of power within specific contexts of practice (Healy, 1998 p.109).

7.4.3 Case management and external power relations

The findings also indicate that case managed intervention underestimates the impact of power relations external to the intervention, which affects what happens in interventions. In this study, service users often resisted social workers, either by avoiding answering them or by lying. Service users seemed to be responding to questions based on their understanding of how their answers would be judged by social workers, rather than taking up the opportunity in the texts. Even when there was a good working relationship with a social worker, the service user appeared to recognise the importance of maintaining secrecy on particular issues, and giving ‘acceptable’ answers, such as denying substance use.

Social workers too appeared to operate in ways affected by external power. The practice of not undertaking consultation with those children and young people who live with their parents may be based on social understandings about parental power over children. In this case, social workers are assuming that parents were speaking for their children. Another example of the impact of external power relations may have been the situation in which the young mother did not feel that she had her own needs met. She felt that her children received all the attention in the intervention. In that example, social workers may have been more concerned with social expectations to protect the children’s immediate safety, and switched focus to the children’s needs, rather than SCARF’s focus on the requirements of the mother.
External power relations concerning childhood also meant that some individuals who were expected to become involved in participatory practices did not describe such involvement, and other groups were excluded from participating altogether. In SCARF, there are no consultation documents, and instructions allow worker discretion over involving young people.

7.5 CONCLUSION

LAC and SCARF exemplify wider social tendencies towards democratisation. They contain textual features and attempt to impose discursive practices that attempt to encourage the participation of service users, and to restrict social workers’ exercise of power.

It does not appear, however, that the changes in power relations in LAC and SCARF, as envisaged by the authors, have been achieved. Some service users did not appear to better inform the interventions, and described withholding information. Not all of those people marked out to participate were able to do so. The progression of increased levels of participation envisaged by the systems’ authors did not eventuate, as service users did not take up the opportunities to participate and workers did not necessarily limit their exercise of power.

Further development of LAC and SCARF to increase service users’ opportunities to participate need to capitalise on those features of the forms that appeared, from this study, to increase opportunities for participation. Development of LAC and SCARF would need to better acknowledge the complex nature of negotiations in child welfare interventions, including the potentially productive operation of power. Developers would need to take into consideration the time taken up by negotiations, and allow for the reassessment of power relations on a regular basis. Furthermore, any change would also need to address the case management systems’ limitations in ‘containing’ social workers’ exercise of power. Developers would need to consider those situations in which service users ‘gave in’ to social workers, and the relatively low level of control that the text appeared to impose on social workers in SCARF-based interventions.
LAC and SCARF would need to be developed to ameliorate the impact of power relations external to the intervention, on both service users and social workers. There are two significant areas to consider here: firstly, the questions in LAC and SCARF where service users misled their social workers; and secondly, situations where service users could not influence the purpose of the intervention because of external power relations (for example legal requirements that young people use LAC).

Developers would also need to consider ways of engaging those individuals who currently feel excluded from SCARF-based interventions, especially the young people. Importantly, there are no written texts to encourage the participation of young people in SCARF. Further research is needed to understand how to extend participatory provisions to those currently excluded from these strategies. This study did not include young people below the age of eight in SCARF and ten in LAC, or individuals who had an interest in the child but were outside the nuclear family, such as members of tribal groups, as none had been located by welfare agencies. Increasing democratisation would also mean that social workers were more effectively restricted in their ability to exercise power in the intervention. Greater constraint on workers’ values may be warranted, including some reinforcement of service users’ capacity to complain.
Chapter 8
Findings: Information and Communication Technology in Child Welfare Practice

This study has stressed the increasing importance of technology in social work interventions and, since the introduction of LAC and SCARF, there has been a rapid change in communication technologies. This chapter explores the question of how recent changes in the use of the internet and mobile phones could contribute to children’s welfare when used in conjunction with case management systems.

I begin by outlining the reasons to consider this question. I examine current understandings of the use of ICT in human services, exploring research from a range of disciplines—the emerging discourse of ‘information and communication technology’. I then examine the lived experience of ICT in current case managed interventions. Finally, I analyse service users’ descriptions of their use of mobile phones and the internet, and their understanding of the relevance of ICT to them. I also focus on the social processes that affect service users’ access to and use of ICT.

This chapter examines the application of ICT to child welfare from the social constructionist perspective outlined in Chapter 2. In this view, the ways in which technology is used are shaped by social processes - factors such as income, age, educational attainment and workforce participation. Technology itself also shapes social processes, offering new and unique possibilities and limitations, in this case, for communications. I draw on Hutchby’s (2001 p.444) concept of ‘affordances’ to describe the ways that aspects of technology frame, but do not determine, use of a particular technology. This theoretical position sees technology as having been formed by and used within social processes, but also as having non-discursive properties. The concept
of ‘affordances’ provides a theoretical base for understanding how technologies may be used differently by different people, or in different contexts, or in ways that extend beyond the scope of their designers. For example, the pen and paper technology currently used with LAC and SCARF provide both possibilities (such as increased data collection potential), and limitations for service users (such as paper-based files not being accessible to service users as they are held within social workers’ offices).

In this chapter, I argue that ICT could bring new possibilities, and limitations, to case managed interventions. Now is an important time to reassess the use of ICT as it is spreading quickly across the community, and the implications for those excluded from its use are not well understood. To date, ICT has been used in child welfare services predominantly for managerial purposes, mainly for the collection of information. Social workers have not explored the communication ‘affordances’ of ICT reflecting the operation of power in child welfare, whereby social workers have co-opted the technology for their own purposes, and thus enhanced their own power, or ICT has been co-opted into a managerial agenda. However, ICT offers other potentially significant affordances, such as, new forms of communication between workers and service users. There is a significant reason to consider such changes, since service users’ experiences of pen and paper technology in case management systems have been problematic.

8.1 ICT IN CONJUNCTION WITH CASE MANAGEMENT: COMPELLING CHANGE

LAC and SCARF have increased recording in child welfare interventions and this has created a potential basis for using ICT. There are three significant reasons to consider this shift.

The first reason is that service users have identified considerable problems in using pen and paper technology when undertaking case management, and these limit the participation of children, young people and parents in welfare interventions. As described in Chapter 6, paper-based case managed systems are unattractive in genre to service users and conditions around their production, distribution and consumption
(discursive practice), create barriers to service users expressing their views and being involved in decision making. LAC and SCARF forms were often seen by service users as intimidating, difficult to use, and primarily designed for organisational purposes. Service users did not have a sense of ownership of the forms. Workers controlled the introduction of service users to the texts, and there were problems with the distribution of confidential material among family members. Service users found the maintenance of forms difficult, and their physical location was the cause of some anxiety.

The second reason to consider ICT in case management relates to an increase in the familiarity with ICT among service users, a change that has occurred since the implementation of LAC, as new ways to communicate developed within the community. Mobile phones and the internet are now widely used in communication, and Australians are generally prolific users of ICT (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2006). In relation to mobile phones, 54% of young people in the general population between the ages of 8–17 years owned a mobile phone in 2006–7 (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2008)\(^1\). Seventy-five percent of 12–14-year-olds and 90% of 15–17-year-olds owned a mobile phone, although only 18% of children under twelve years of age had a mobile phone. Two-thirds of 18–29-year-olds used SMS each day (Blanchard, Metcalf, Degney, Herman, & Burns, 2008). Australian use of the internet is similarly extensive. The ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) reports that in 2006–7, 64% of Australian households had internet access at home, and 61% of people over the age of 15 used the internet daily. An OECD (2006) report on use of the internet by Australian young people in 2003 showed a higher rate of use than in the general population: 74% of Australian children used the internet regularly for looking up information, and 90% were confident internet users. Use of the internet at home is evident even among disadvantaged families. A 2001 survey of families whose primary income came from government income support through Centrelink (McLaren & Zappala, 2002) reported that 59% had home computers, and 32% had access to the

\(^{12}\) This report claimed that socio-economic status of children had little effect on mobile phone ownership, but this claim must be treated cautiously as the method used was insufficiently detailed to gather data on the very poor. It is contradicted by studies specifically undertaken with disadvantaged people and described in this chapter.
internet at home. This represents a rapid increase in internet use in low-income households, as in 1999 only 6% were connected to the internet (McLaren & Zappala, 2002). Generally, adult members of disadvantaged families were less likely to have access to the internet than their children (who used the internet at school) (McLaren & Zappala, 2002). A 2008 study showed that among a group of marginalised young people (aged 13–25 years), 92% had internet access: 43% at home, 30% at libraries and 17% at schools. Frequency of use was high with 37.5% using the internet daily and 30% weekly (Blanchard et al., 2008). In addition to the spread of ICT, there is also a wider range of uses of the internet affecting Australians. There is a growing range of applications developed since the introduction of LAC and SCARF, including: e-mail, chat groups, virtual worlds, Instant Messaging (IM), social networking sites (Crystal, 2006) such as Facebook and MySpace, and Twittering (or micro blogging sites).

A third reason to consider the use of ICT in child welfare is that new technologies have seeped into welfare services, though there has been little investigation of the implications. It is possible that this resource is being used in ways that may increase the power of dominant groups and further reduce the power of the less powerful. Those without access to ICT may become increasingly disadvantaged (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008 describe these tendencies world-wide ), and social workers may have a professional responsibility to consider this issue. Social workers may already be directly implicated in this growing disadvantage.

8.2 EMERGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF ICT

This section explores current understandings of ICT in human services, that is, it analyses the emerging discourse on ICT in the literature from a range of disciplines. Literature in the area of child welfare is significantly limited; however, other human service disciplines suggest findings which may be relevant to the role of ICT in child welfare. It is in the area of communication that ICT raises the possibility of new ‘affordances’ relevant to child welfare (Tregeagle & Darcy 2008). I argue that in child

---

13 Disadvantage was defined in this study as low income families where 90% were on Centrelink payments, even where at least one member was employed in part-time work.
welfare, as in other human service areas, ICT has been co-opted by individuals with greater opportunities to exercise power, to the detriment of service users. The communication affordances of ICT however, could be used to enhance service users’ opportunities to exercise power.

8.2.1 Limited debate within social work literature
Within the social work profession, theorists and researchers have been predominantly concerned with the use of ICT for the gathering and processing of information to support managers. For example, a study of computerised systems in social security governance in 13 countries found that ICT was used overwhelmingly for management purposes (Henman & Adler, 2003). Computerisation has been used to improve ‘governing processes’ such as: increasing productivity, cutting costs, improving information flow, automating decision making, and measuring performance. ICT has had a role in control of staff by monitoring productivity and measuring performance. It has empowered staff: by assisting in managing complexity, providing information for front-line staff, and improving working conditions. Finally, ICT has been used to control claimants through detecting over-payment and reducing fraud. These uses contrast with the ways in which ICT might have been used to empower claimants, such as increasing the responsiveness of organisations, encouraging sensitivity to user-demand, or enabling self-assessment.

These researchers claim that ICT has been used by managers to increase their power: ‘ICT increased control of staff and claimants by management rather than empowering them’ (Henman & Adler, 2003 p.139). They discovered that opportunities had been lost for enhancing government service by treating the ‘whole person’, integrating service delivery and improving customer service. Hough (1996 P.164) identifies similar trends in the early use of computers in child welfare in client information systems, ‘best explained by reference to the needs of dominant power groups within the organisation in question’. Munro (2005) argues that frontline workers’ need for information and decision making are not adequately addressed in comparison with the requirements of managers. Garrett (2005) draws attention to the use of ICT to allow a growth of surveillance in juvenile justice, child welfare and child protection. Computer-based
systems such as the Integrated Children’s System are identified by Garrett as functional elements in government agendas for ‘joined up thinking, the e-government agenda and ‘marketisation’ (Garrett, 2005 p. 529), which serve the interests of both government and the corporate sector.

Despite this concern about the managerial application of ICT, there has been relatively little consideration in the social work literature of how social workers might employ ICT directly in their work with service users (Sapey, 1997; Davies and Morgan, 2005; Tregeagle & Darcy 2008; Schembri, 2009). Recent research on service providers’ attitudes to using ICT with service users indicates significant barriers and poor understanding of the role of ICT in the lives of service users (Blanchard, et al., 2008). In this study, service providers used mobile phones and the internet but identified barriers to using ICT with service users. They described problems caused by: costs, low literacy and skill levels, poor equipment, dangers, the risk of alienating those without access to ICT, and their own poor skills to teach young people how to use it.

8.2.2 Emerging understandings of communication affordances

Within human services but also in law, media and psychology, there is growing interest in the impact of ICT on human communication. I will employ Fairclough’s (2003) concept of ‘discursive practices’ to explore this literature on the ways that technology may affect social practices in child welfare interventions. I argue that ICT provides an opportunity to enhance communication and alter power relations through changes in the production, distribution and consumption of text. Like all technology, however, ICT has limitations for child welfare communication.

8.2.2.1 ICT and production of written text

ICT could change the production of text by giving service users greater ability to initiate communication, by letting them control the timing of production, and by reducing physical, social and educational barriers to communication.

ICT may allow service users a greater ability to initiate interactions with social workers at times and places that suit them. Many human service websites attribute their success to the opening up of access, removing barriers to initiation of communication, and
allowing control over sequencing of communication (Christensen, et al., 2004). The very nature of ICT, with its associations of interactivity, egalitarianism, being children’s particular proficiency and fun (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004), may of itself encourage service users to initiate interaction, especially when compared with the bureaucratic and ordered nature of paper-based forms initiated by workers. With the pen and paper technology currently used in LAC and SCARF, the timing of interactions between service users and professionals is largely determined by workers, but this could change with the use of ICT. Contact between social workers and service users is ordinarily limited by office hours or, if after-hours, provoked by a crisis; more routine contacts may be separated by weeks or months. In contrast, mobile phone or internet access could allow service users to initiate communication at times that suit them. Mobile phones can offer the opportunity for workers to be contacted immediately, and at times of risk for the service user, as well as allowing greater social connection between social workers and service users. Trial welfare programs, which have made mobile phones available to homeless young people, show that ICT access can facilitate contact with workers in emergencies, as well as proactively engaging young people (Hoyles & Tregeagle, 2007).

Physical and social barriers to service user initiation of communication may be altered by ICT. Vulnerable families are often geographically isolated, through disability or the inaccessibility and cost of transport. The internet could help offset these barriers. It could reduce social embarrassment at using child welfare services, by reducing the need to make appointments with workers and travel to see them. The greater anonymity of the internet could assist in making approaches for help less stigmatising. This is especially apparent in the light of research that found that young people continue to express discomfort at the care-planning meetings, and find office environments intimidating (Create Foundation, 2004).

ICT may offer opportunities to initiate communication for people who may otherwise be discouraged by their low level of education and poor literacy, as the internet may reduce social constraints, particularly status differences in communication (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004). Theorists suggest the internet minimises differences in educational levels among those using it as a medium for communication (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004 p.16). This claim has been
contested by research indicating that there is a strong transfer of social cues even in anonymous communication (Spears, Postmes, Lea, & Wolbert, 2002). Researchers note that, while the literacy level involved with ICT is clearly higher than that required in conversation, the spelling and grammar used in SMS or on the internet is more flexible than on paper (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Limitations imposed by low levels of literacy can also be avoided in computer applications like Viewpoint, which exploits the audio capacity of computers by allowing questions to be read aloud rather than written (Davies & Morgan, 2005). Websites can also tailor words to the audience, supplemented by graphics or photos. It has also been suggested that the ability to communicate over the internet is easier because of changes that computers bring to communication:

E-mail communication is characterised by a distinctive combination of oral and written styles. The new medium invites informality even in business or official contexts. It is a kind of “interactive written discourse” (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004 p.33).

Theorists also note that values and attributes can be quite different in cyber communication. For example creativity, wit, and humour may be more valued, and given more credence than literacy (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004).

It is far from certain how these potential changes in production might affect welfare practice. Social workers’ institutional power and legal authority would have to be negotiated carefully. For example, it may be that social workers’ duty-of-care obligation to physically lay eyes on the children will mean that there must be a mix of on-line and face-to-face communication.

### 8.2.2.2 ICT and improved distribution of written text

ICT may alter the ways written texts are distributed by reducing social workers’ control over distribution while simultaneously allowing service users greater access. Currently, written records must be kept in specific physical locations and can be mislaid or mistakenly fall into unauthorised hands. The most recent file is usually in the social workers’ office and inaccessible to service users for much of the time. In contrast, records kept on the World Wide Web and accessible to those who need them, could
allow the most recent version of a document to be available directly to service users. Children, young people and their parents could thus have unfettered access to what is written about them and be able to add to this text.

The internet may allow for more efficient and reliable distribution of written text, and thus offer service users more control. The capacity of computers to be ‘password protected’ and to attribute ‘security levels’ to information could result in better control of the distribution of information, compared with paper-based systems. Such confidentiality is an important element in the success of mental health web-sites (National Rural Health Alliance, 2006). ICT can also offer the potential for information to be predictably distributed to service users because this can be done automatically. This capacity may be useful in providing reminders of meetings and improving efficiency, as it does not rely on workers who may forget these tasks. In previous studies of a paper-based LAC, service users complained of difficulty understanding the processes, and the timing of decision making and the opportunities for participating in it:

Highlight(ing) the need for professionals to inform and remind children and young people of their rights within a case and care planning process (Create Foundation, 2004 p.11).

Mobile phones may also be very useful in providing reminders through SMS (Hoyles & Tregeagle, 2007). These may be non-threatening and timely reminders for young people who are comfortable with new forms of technology.

8.2.2.3 ICT and consumption of text

The consumption of written text may also be affected by the use of ICT, as internet access may be more attractive for service users in the short-term, and easier to maintain over the long term. As argued in Chapter 2, the LAC and SCARF forms were designed to encourage ‘consumption’ (or interpretation) of the text by service users, but this may be limited in pen and paper technology. ICT could alter this. Fairclough points out the central importance of genre in understanding the impact of text, and this has significant implications for the ways that LAC and SCARF are interpreted (Fairclough, 2003). A
change from bureaucratic forms, such as those currently used in LAC and SCARF, to an interactive web page could well improve consumption and encourage opportunities for service users to examine these texts (Blanchard, et al., 2008; Shrimpton & McKenzie, 2005).

ICT thus appears to be a genre that offers new possibilities for consumption, which may potentially contribute to children’s welfare. The internet can be an attractive medium in which many users take an interest, and which they seek out for various reasons, including as a means for maintaining and developing social contacts (Downes, 2005). These advantageous attributes may also apply to child welfare. The internet can be a source of company and entertainment (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004). It may also offer significant opportunities to people excluded from social interactions by economic and social circumstances. While children generally preferred the company of peers to that offered by computer-based contact, this was not always the case:

> If the child is alone or feels lonely, the media can act as a friend; media offers social contacts in the form of para-social interaction (Suss, Furlonger, Furlonger & Sutherland, 2001 p.31)

ICT has been shown to be more useable with the socially anxious, and it offers advantages to those dealing with taboo subjects (Tyler, 2002) an issue relevant to child welfare.

There is a range of hypotheses about the ways in which ICT may change communication. Computer mediated communication can allow individuals to present themselves to others in a better light (Joinson, 2005) and can remove from any interaction socially restricting features that stop communication in face-to-face relationships, such as shyness (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004), or where personal appearance is an issue (Walther, 1996). Computers can also allow people time to consider and frame responses because they do not have to answer questions or respond immediately (internet relationships may be asynchronous) (Joinson, 2005). Computer mediated communication can also appear to offer greater anonymity (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004; Joinson, 2005), and this may be the case even through privacy is not guaranteed (Joinson, 2005).
Communicating by computer can also lead to a greater focus on individual feelings and details of relationships, and communication may be more likely, as a person may feel more akin to other people who communicate electronically (Joinson, 2005). Furthermore, communication may be richer, as on-line communication generally means the provision of greater personal detail as a means of reducing uncertainty (Walther, 1996). It is also apparent that communication on-line between people can create a ‘feedback loop’, which means that self-disclosure is reinforced (Walther, 1996).

Longer-term use of the LAC and SCARF forms could be enhanced through the internet. As we saw in Chapter 5, service users had problems keeping LAC and SCARF forms for future reference. Forms were lost or sometimes destroyed because of their emotional nature. The use of ICT could allow forms to be maintained in electronic format, and accessed whenever a service user wanted to reflect on them.

### 8.2.3 Communication limitations of ICT relevant to child welfare

The theoretical position on technology underpinning this study holds that technologies not only create possibilities but also bring limitations in the way that they can be used. I will address four potential areas of limitation of ICT in child welfare communication: the risk to the social worker-service user relationship; the potential loss of assessment capacity; worker insensitivity to individual differences; and; the potential dangers to children in new technologies.

I will use research undertaken in other disciplines in which ICT has been applied. This research is only in the early stages of development and there has been no specific study related to applications of ICT in child welfare. Future research specific to child welfare will thus be required, and this will need to be ongoing to monitor changes in technology, and the way it is used.

#### 8.2.3.1 Risk to relationship

The positive, change-producing and life-enhancing aspects of the relationship between social workers and service users may be damaged by any reduction in the level of face-to-face contact. Although it has been suggested that loss of face-to-face contact could
retard the development of relationships in interventions, this is now substantially rejected by researchers, and on-line relationships are now viewed as highly meaningful (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Furthermore, development of internet applications that can use sight (such as Skype in which images are available during synchronous conversations over the internet) means that some non-verbal behavioural cues are now possible in computer-mediated communication. Nevertheless, the dynamics of relationship development on-line may be different from the dynamics of face-to-face communication. Trust and a sense of care could be threatened in on-line relationships and the inflexibility of websites could constrain relationships. Any use of ICT in child welfare needs to be considered in relation to its impact on communication. The absence of social cues on-line, such as body language, may change the speed of relationship development. While this is as yet poorly researched, at the very least this needs to be considered, to minimise any possible adverse effects. Techniques of on-line communication have been adapted in other areas of communication. For example, qualitative researchers working on-line have been quick to learn the importance of providing personal and social cues in developing on-line relationships (Orgad, 2005). We must be thoughtful in negotiating the balance between on-line and face-to-face communication, and the timing of computer use in the relationship.

Computers programs (such as questions completed on-line) may bring rigidity to the social worker-service user relationship through their capability for defining and controlling discourses, and this may not contribute to children’s welfare. Paper-based ‘pre-formatted’ interventions have been the subject of rigorous critique in the literature on case management, because they can limit professional creativity and discretion (Calder, 2004). This rigidity could be exacerbated by the increased use of ICT, because limited interpersonal interactions due to reduced contact with workers may result in reduced professional discretion in applying the case management system. While this argument needs to be taken seriously, it is also important to acknowledge that face-to-face child welfare practice is also highly influenced by professional values, and interactions are not free from the effects of local organisational culture (D’Cruz, 2004).
The ability to negotiate a relationship on-line has been shown to have quite different dynamics from those that apply in face-to-face interactions, and this may significantly affect child welfare interventions. Research into anonymous on-line negotiations (Thompson & Nadler, 2002) has demonstrated that there is less relationship-building behaviour than in face-to-face negotiation. Individuals seem to be less accountable and more likely to ‘burn their bridges’, and be more impulsive, rude, mistrustful and suspicious. The asynchronous nature of some on-line communications may modify this tendency, in that breaks in communication may provide both worker and service user greater time for thought before responding. This is a feature of e-mail but is absent from instant messaging. Synchronous (real-time) communication can encourage ‘hair-trigger’ responses, and this could be a significant disadvantage in work with adolescents and adults who may have difficulty controlling impulses. The impact of the form of on-line communication needs to be better understood and translated into agency policy for social workers.

8.2.3.2 Loss of assessment capacity

Communication through ICT may distort the ability of social workers to undertake assessments. Image-management, deceit, and the capacity to physically ‘distance’ in on-line communication may be problematic. It is very likely that any moves towards on-line communication will have to be used in conjunction with face-to-face assessment for reasons such as these.

Aspects of on-line communication may also inhibit realistic communication (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). The importance of imagination in on-line communication and the scope for imagination to become unrealistic has been noted in on-line dating (Ben-Ze‘ev, 2004). Service users may also be able use the ‘distance’ of the internet to protect themselves from scrutiny by worker.

Assessment of the situation of a child or young person may also be affected adversely by the ‘distance’ between participants in internet relationships. Workers may be able to avoid physical contact with threatening service users by using communication over the internet. For example, they can avoid threatening contact with violent men. This strategy
may mean however, that the most vulnerable children are left in dangerous circumstances. The tendency of workers to avoid service users who may be threatening is well recognised in face-to-face work (Cooper, 2005), and could easily be made worse if the balance of on-line and face-to-face communication is not appropriate.

8.2.3.3 Potential exclusion

There is evidence of considerable individual differences in the use of ICT and some groups of individuals are less likely to use ICT than others (Facer and Furlong, 2001). Unless this situation is taken into account, some service users may find themselves excluded from communication with workers, if ICT based communication becomes more widespread. In addition to issues of poverty and literacy, other social processes can also affect the use of ICT, such as age and gender. For example, younger children are far less likely to own phones, and rates of male and female ownership vary (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2008). In addition, even when there is access to the internet, individuals vary in their communication skills (Orgad, 2005). Social researchers note that some individuals who contributed little on-line could be much more expressive when in direct contact and vice-versa.

8.2.3.4 Potential dangers

There is growing awareness that the internet can open new opportunities for exploitation of children and alienated individuals, and that children are currently not well equipped to deal with these issues (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Such situations could severely jeopardise children’s welfare. Websites for children may attract paedophiles, and they may also lead to a substantial amount of time spent away from face-to-face socialising, and create disturbing opportunities for bullying (Maher, 2008). There are also more subtle effects for those communicating on-line, such as a loss of privacy (through disclosing ‘too much’ information about themselves), an overload of information (with users not being able to discriminate between different forms of information), and problems of identity theft through deception and fraud (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). All of these problems have been found with internet applications such as chatrooms and e-mail
for example, in November 2008, there were initial reports of infiltration of Facebook sites by people wishing to exploit children (Moses, 2008).

In considering the potential limitations and disadvantages of new forms of communications technology, it is also necessary to consider the implications of failing to engage service users with the internet. A ‘head in the sand’ approach may leave vulnerable children increasingly disadvantaged, as they will not develop the skills needed to manage the internet. This is not only important later in life, it is also important while the children are still young, given the likelihood that children may be using computers in some way, irrespective of their use with LAC and SCARF. Ignoring the issue of internet safety may further exacerbate dangers for the most vulnerable children who may miss the opportunity to develop important social skills in dealing with on-line threats. Research on the internet and the first generation of people growing up with ICT has found, however, that these dangers appear no worse than in face-to-face contact (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). It is those young people who are not exposed to opportunities to learn about the internet who will be in greatest danger (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Failure to use the internet may result in the loss of other valuable learning opportunities, including options for exercising creativity, the capacity to manage on-line commerce, the job market, educational research and opportunities for innovation. Palfrey and Gasser (2008, p.241) argue that:

The people to be worried about are those who are growing up in a digital age but who are not learning these sophisticated information-gathering and information-processing skills, or creating things of their own based on what they learn and share with others.

The use of ICT will require careful attention to research in a wide range of disciplines. Research is not necessarily easily applicable to child welfare, having been largely undertaken in anonymous interpersonal interactions on-line. Social workers would seem to have a particular responsibility to disadvantaged children, however, to ensure they are not further disadvantaged by restricted access to what is of potential social benefit on the
internet. There is also an ethical question involved for social workers in educating children about internet dangers.

8.3 SOCIAL WORKERS’ CO-OPTION OF ICT

The following section describes the current use of ICT in child welfare case management services. Its origins of this interest lie in social workers’ use of paper-based case management systems as a source of data.

8.3.1 Case management systems and data collection

The potential for LAC and SCARF to be used as tools to collect data has been a significant element in the implementation of both case management systems and has underpinned the development of electronic versions in Australia and the United Kingdom (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006).

Data collection has been a growing issue in child welfare. Parton (2008 p.260) has described British child welfare since the 1970s as a period in which:

> Information took on a strategic significance for both protecting children and making professionals accountable ... by the early/mid 1990s, it is clear that social work has become much more “routinised” and “proceduralised” and this was having a significant impact on its “form of knowledge”.

Interest in the data collection potential of LAC and SCARF was evident from the beginning of their development, consistent with that trend in the United Kingdom: ‘Another advantage of adopting standard measures of outcome is that they create consistency in the collection of information’ (Parker et al., 1991 p.13). Advocates saw that data collection had both professional and management implications:

> We need to consider how [service users’] experiences and progress can be systematically assessed and monitored. Moreover, in the current political and economic climate, there is increasing emphasis on the need to ensure that the public service provides value for money, and this can only be done if we have accurate information on their outcomes ... the chief beneficiaries of such an
exercise should not be the organisation or its employees, but the children and young people for whom the service is provided (Jackson & Kilroe, 1996 p.14).

Data collection has thus been linked to improving professional responses at the local level, and in the development of policy and practice in social care (Ward, 2004 p.13).

In Australia, data collection has been seen as central to advocates’ interest in the reform of service systems, reflecting professional concern with outcomes at the practice and administrative level:

Without the processes and procedures that make it possible to record, track and link decisions concerning a child or young person in care, it is impossible to hold those that are administratively and clinically responsible for the management of the individual “case” responsible, let alone facilitate practice that carefully, respectfully and practically attends the child/young person’s needs and, so far as may be possible, wants (Yeatman & Penglase, 2007 p.2).

The LAC Project managers identified information as central to social work supervision (Dixon, 2001b) and to smoothing the transition of information between workers (an issue increasingly important because of high turn-over of staff). It also addressed two local issues. Firstly, children moving from State to State did not have to have comparable information maintained in the different State jurisdictions – each State and Territory collected child welfare data differently (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006). Secondly, there was an inadequate national data set:

There are no uniform mechanisms for organising the way in which Australian out of home care data are collected, nor a corresponding Australian national research agenda (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006 p. 398).

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) pointed to the importance of systematised information collection to improve out of home care research (Wise, 2003c).
The capacity to use LAC and SCARF for data collection led to alterations of paper-based case management systems in the years immediately after implementation. In Canada, LAC was altered by researchers ‘to identify how the development of children in care compared to their peers through comparison with the Statistics Canada National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY)’ (Cheers, et al., 2007 p.22). SCARF was developed within Australia with an eye to data development and computerisation, with questions framed in order to allow for easier conversion to databases (Tolley, 2004). In England, LAC and the Assessment Framework have been redeveloped into the Integrated Children’s System (ICS), which was designed in electronic format specifically to allow computerised reporting to central government and develop the costing of services (Jones, 2006).

### 8.3.2 ICT, data and case management systems

The capacity of ICT to more efficiently collect and manipulate data through case management was quickly recognised in Australia with the development of LACES (Cheers & Morwitzer, 2006). Despite this, no State or Territory government has used the electronic option and the Federal Government has not taken up the AIFS recommendations for national data collection (Wise, 2003c). In contrast, in the United Kingdom, data collection using computers has been a key feature in the development of the Integrated Children’s System (ICS):

> Fundamentally, it is the volume and complexity of information required for the practice and management of child welfare cases and the expectation of an information age which requires that ICS, unlike its predecessors, be underpinned by an electronic information system (Jones, 2006 p. 410).

The use of ICT has been contested in the social work literature, however, with criticism of the impact of data collection becoming more urgent with the growing use of ICT (Parton, 2008, 2009). Parton (2008) claimed that information technology has had a fundamental impact on social workers by moving social work practice from narrative ‘to an endeavor increasingly framed by the logic of the database’. This impact may come about through:
• greatly increased accountability;

• loss of knowledge, through the restricted way that data is collected;

• distortion of service user identity, when this identity is ‘constructed according to the fields that constitute the database’ (Parton, 2008 p.263); and

• information becoming increasingly more important than the people:
Increasingly, it seems the body can be dematerialised into a series of information patterns, so that the disembodied and decontextualised symbols become the primary point of reference for the systems which social workers are part of (Parton, 2008 p. 263).

These trends have been linked to attempts to govern families:

Not only does the use of computerised information systems mean that the traditional boundaries between “public” and “private” the key spaces in which social work operates—become blurred, but social work becomes even more implicated than ever in wide-ranging, complex and unstable systems of surveillance (Parton, 2008 p.264)

ICT has been used increasingly to allow the development of data collection, but this has increased the opportunities to exercise power for managerial purposes, and has come to be seen as a threat to professional interests.

**8.4 SERVICE USERS’ DIVERSE EXPERIENCES AND EMERGING DISADVANTAGE**

The social shaping theory of technology, described in Chapter 3, indicates the importance of social processes in the use of the internet and mobile phones, but there is little known about the use of ICT by people dependent on child welfare agencies. Consequently, in my study, I asked service users to describe their current access to ICT:
to mobile phones, computers and the internet. I was particularly interested in home access to the internet, because this is important for people who are unemployed, isolated, lack access to transport, or live in areas that are unsafe. I asked whether service users saw potential in ICT for communication with their social workers and whether they had experienced communication difficulties that needed to be addressed. I asked family members about their use of e-mail, chatrooms (synchronous and asynchronous), virtual worlds, the World Wide Web, instant messaging, blogging (Crystal, 2006), and social networking sites.

8.4.1 The social processes affecting access to ICT

I found that mobile phone ownership was widespread, but that internet access was more limited and presented complex problems. The financial circumstances of service users seemed to be the primary explanation for patterns of access. The major barriers to obtaining and maintaining internet access were the software costs of maintaining computers and affording an internet service provider.

Most of the service users interviewed owned a mobile phone (27 of 32 participants). Age was an important factor in ownership, with individuals at both of the extremes of the age range tending not to use a mobile phone: one adult participant had never had any interest in owning one, and the youngest two children and one older adult did not show any interest in replacing stolen or lost phones. Poverty played a role in access to mobile phones. One adolescent who did not have a mobile phone had previously had one, but after it was broken she was unable to replace it.
Table 4. Ownership of mobile phones among categories of the research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>owned a mobile phone at time of research interview</th>
<th>formerly owned a mobile phone</th>
<th>never owned a mobile phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people who used LAC (7)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people and children in family support services whose families used SCARF (7)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult interviewees who had used LAC or SCARF (18)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to home computers was more limited. Only eight participants had working computers in their homes—four of these were supplied by foster families and two of the SCARF participants living with their own families were in one household. Many service users had had computers in the past, but had lost access because of poverty or social disruption. Eleven participants using SCARF had lost their home computers for reasons such as adult relationship breakdown, a house-fire, unaffordable leasing arrangements and pawning. Other service users had computers but were unable to make them work. Four families had computers, but were unable to afford the technical assistance required to get them working. In one household there were three donated computers, none of which worked! One young person had lost access to a computer when she left foster care.

All the participants with working computers had internet access. Those participants who did not have home internet access were able to access the internet from other locations if they wished to. All school children had access to the internet at school. Many participants aged between 18 and mid-30s used friends’ computers or internet cafes, although for some, this was not convenient and their use was infrequent. Only the older
parents said they were not interested in computers, and that they lacked the skills to use the internet.

**Table 5. Access to home computers and the internet amongst categories of the research participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Currently have a functioning computer at home</th>
<th>Formerly had access to a home computer</th>
<th>Never had a home computer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people who used LAC (7)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(computer supplied by foster or adoptive family)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people whose family used SCARF (7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult interviewees who used LAC or SCARF (18)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings indicate that particular social characteristics of service users related to poverty had a significant impact on service users’ capacity to access both mobile phones and the internet. Young people who had been in foster care and were now independent had more access to the internet than any other group. Age was also an important factor in the use of both mobile phones and the internet.

### 8.4.2 Social factors affecting use of ICT

When mobile phones and computers were available to service users, the way that ICT was used also appeared to be strongly related to poverty. Children and adults cited the cost of mobile phone calls, internet service providers, computer hardware and software as factors affecting the use of ICT.

All but two adult participants were on pre-paid mobile phone schemes, and that meant they had to have credit to use the phone. In some circumstances, they had not been able to respond to calls from welfare agencies. One young man, who was supported in independent housing from age sixteen, explained:
I definitely used to run out of credit ... my worker] would call me and I wouldn’t be able to call her back. She’d send me a message and I wouldn’t be able to get back to her.

Service users also described being unable to talk for any length of time when they did have credit, because of the costs involved. Text messaging (texting) was the preferred option for younger participants, although it was unclear whether this was due to the higher cost of voice calls, or to a preference for texting. Older participants rarely used texting, but most participants could use a mobile phone in either mode.

Service users who did have access to the internet used the applications in limited ways. They did not like to use e-mail, and were unlikely to check for mail or to respond to messages. A number of participants felt that e-mail took time and effort, as well as skills they were not comfortable with. Many stated that there was no point in checking as they rarely received e-mails. This response by an eighteen-year-old is typical:

I don’t read e-mails. I look at them but, I dunno, it’s just something about reading and writing back—it just takes too much effort for me. I dunno—if the worker had e-mailed me, I probably would have looked at it but not really have taken it in.

Service users also did not seem comfortable with time delays between sending and receiving a message. However, this finding must be considered in relation to reports in the wider community in which there appears to be a lessening of e-mail’s popularity, particularly amongst the young, because of cluttered inboxes and spam, or unwanted email (Canberra Times, 2006).

Both adults and young people expressed the view that e-mails were not an appropriate form of communication with welfare agencies:

I think e-mail ... puts up more of a barrier sort of thing, I’d rather talk to someone on the phone, and it’s a lot more personal.
Two young people, who were both in care many hours away from their statutory workers, said that they had initiated e-mail contact with workers, but that this had been restricted to practical issues, such as arrangements for meetings.

8.4.3 Service users’ application of ICT ‘affordances’

The internet was used in ways that reflected the social circumstances and needs of service user’s families, but were nevertheless very important to their circumstances. Some service users had recognised certain advantages of the internet that were particularly relevant to their own circumstances.

Young people, including the younger mothers interviewed, preferred IM (Instant Messaging) as their primary use of the internet (including applications such as MSN and Yahoo!Messenger). This usage is consistent with research that indicates that IM has emerged as a significant form of communication among young people in the general community (Pakula, 2006). Some participants had frequently used IM for long periods of time, when they had previously had internet access, and these were among the small number who used internet in libraries and cafes. These people said that IM was very important to their social functioning. The burgeoning social networking sites, which provide the dual functions of IM and blogging in personalised spaces, were used extensively by those with internet access. A number of the 8–17-year-olds interviewed said either that they regularly used MySpace and Bebo (two commercial websites commonly used in Australia), or that they wished to use them, and that this kind of activity accounted for a large amount of the online time. The use of particular types of IM has been shown to differ among particular social groups. For example, Indigenous young people seem to make more use of Bebo (Blanchard 2008). Some very disrupted families had adapted their use of IM to address their families’ communication problems. A mother of five, who refused to allow contact between the children and her violent ex-partner, had effectively used the internet to maintain contact between the children and their father, and she had also used it to overcome her own social isolation:

Q: Did you use the internet a lot?
A:  Yeah MSN, talking to my mum and friends ... Every day, I would do all my housework, put the kids to bed and like sit there, late at night, and get friends on-line.

Q:  You must really miss it?

A:  Yes we just text now. It's much more expensive.

Q:  Do you miss the social contact?

A:  There was just more outlet, I was just more able to relax and talk to friends. The kids used talk to their Dad on-line, with web-cam, and their grandparents.

Q:  That must have stopped you being worried about his violence to you [She had not let her children see their father in person]

A:  They haven’t spoken to him since [the family lost internet access].

In another family, the boy’s siblings lived with different step-families in three different States. Following a further relationship breakdown, in which access to the internet was lost, IM contact between the children had stopped. These findings indicate that internet-based communication proved to be particularly relevant to, and highly valued by, families who lived in poverty and had disrupted relationships.

Other applications of the internet, such as blogging, games (including virtual worlds), and the use of synchronous and asynchronous chatrooms, did not appear to be widely used. Younger interviewees reported using computer games, although it was not clear if they used on-line games or software that was down-loaded onto the computer.

8.4.4 Communicating with social workers

Few service users had used ICT with their social worker, although many were interested in doing so to a greater extent. A number who reported difficulties in getting access to social workers saw ICT as potentially able to assist, and others were open to the idea of using ICT as a normal method of communication.
The only examples of ICT-based communications between service users and social workers in this study were limited to mobile phone calls and e-mail. Two young people recounted having initiated e-mail relationships with workers to make practical arrangements when they lived a long way away from workers. Two other young people said social workers had refused to give them their mobile phone numbers on the grounds that this technology was only for worker-to-worker communication. One parent of children in care complained that the use of e-mails between workers effectively excluded her from the communication, and that she thus had to depend on others:

*This other [statutory] worker keeps on saying she’s going to turn up for meetings and never does, and the only way they can reach her is by e-mail as you can’t get her on the phone.*

Hence, some of the interest by service users in using ICT related to communication problems. Although the majority of participants indicated that communication with workers was unproblematic, a few complained that messages did not get to workers and that social workers were often slow to respond. One young woman described the difficulty of working through office message systems:

*I get so annoyed so I don’t ring my worker because whenever I ring her she’s out of the office and I have to talk to her fucking answering machine and ask her to get back ASAP, and she kind of comes back six days late.*

This study did not set out to investigate why workers failed to respond, and it is unclear whether this was the result of the inefficiency of the office message systems, or of the priority that workers gave to responding.

When asked about the potential to use ICT with agencies, participants were cautious but open to the idea:

*I’m not fazed when it comes to that sort of stuff. You are still talking to someone regardless of [whether you’re on the phone or on the internet].*
There was interest among younger people in using ICT, and they could see it had advantages in comparison with paper-based case management systems. One young person commented:

The internet is really easier to fill out in more respects than paper because you can have a personalised number with name, personalised entry with databases, in that way you can read up on the importance of filling out information, get stats or info about things and you can do things like, you know, test things on the computer.

A number of participants saw limitations in using IM in welfare communication. One felt that it should only be used in a pre-existing relationship:

Yeah, at the beginning it would probably be good, but you shouldn’t start introducing yourself on MSN that would be stupid, really stupid.

Some younger participants found it unusual that welfare agencies were not taking advantage of new technologies.

8.4.5 Individual differences in internet use

Service users in this study had diverse interests in ICT. Although most participants wanted access, there were some who were relatively uninterested in socialising on-line. Three adolescent boys, who had home internet and used it for various school-related activities, saw it as a waste of time:

Well [the web] is for school so I have to do it, but other than that I’d rather be somewhere else.

The way that the internet was used seemed to vary with age. A twenty-year-old who no longer used IM described changes in use as she grew older:

I was always on MSN, it is the coolest thing when you’re 14, 15 or 16—they are the best times to message ... but my friends have grown out of it. No one uses MSN any more.
IM use appears to be age and peer-group related, but this impression may need to be re-assessed with a greater number of service users, and with other applications.

8.4.6 ICT shaping social processes: the increasing disadvantage of service users

Many service users without the internet and those who had lost access felt increasingly socially disadvantaged. This was not universally the case and some individual differences seemed linked to age and gender.

Service users who had formerly had access to the internet said they missed it when they didn’t have it any more, and that lack of access created problems in their lives. Some feared increasing economic marginalisation. One young Aboriginal mother had done a course to maintain her computer skills and another expressed concern about loss of computer skills since she had left school. Other socially isolated younger mothers expressed resentment at not being able to use IM to reduce their loneliness. For young people, inability to participate in IM was a significant barrier to social contact:

My friends have MSN and I go onto it [at school], nearly all my people are on it.

A ten-year-old complained:

Like they say “what’s your address?” and I [have to] say “I don’t have one”.

Many young people also felt disadvantaged in their school work. Even participants in the 8–12-year age group reported using the web at school, and those without the internet at home were conscious of educational disadvantage. A fifteen-year-old who accessed the internet at her public library commented:

It’s really annoying now because I’ve got like assignments and stuff and like I have to catch a bus.

This young woman lived in an area where she did not feel safe travelling at night, which meant that her access to the internet was effectively limited.
Most participants did not mention lack of access to other resources offered by the internet, such as ready access to job advertisements, banking or bill-paying on-line. Only two parents mentioned the inconvenience of not having access of this kind: one mother commented that her life would be easier with the internet, a father complained that he had lost access to the cheap goods he had previously bought on the internet to run a market stall. There were a number of adults with experience of the internet who had used it to find general information, and they now found it annoying not to have such ready access.

Some participants did not have either mobile phones or the internet, and these individuals saw their disadvantage as significantly compounded. There were three young people who were particularly distressed by their lack of access. One was a fifteen-year-old who was excluded from most peer group contact out of school because her phone was broken, and she could not join in after-school conversations. Her feeling of alienation was aggravated by the fact that her family had been re-housed in an isolated public housing estate.

The two oldest (over 45 years of age) and the two youngest participants (under ten years of age) did not describe being concerned about their exclusion from using ICT. This may be related to younger people not utilising the internet so much, and older people never having experienced the technology.

8.5 DISCUSSION: A CHALLENGE TO CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

This chapter has documented the increasing use of ICT in both the wider Australian community and in human services; it also notes the pressure for use of this technology in child welfare. I have described the use of ICT in child welfare to be primarily for management purposes (for collecting data). Social workers have not themselves demonstrated in the literature any significant interest in extending the use of ICT for communication with service users, even though service users in this investigation have shown a growing willingness to do so. Service users in this study also generally showed recognition of the potential and actual benefits ICT offered them.
Many of the findings of this chapter are speculative in relation to future use of ICT. Without direct experience of electronic case management, these service users were only able to make a limited contribution to understand how production, distribution and consumption of texts could affect the welfare intervention. Their limited use of the internet also meant that this study could throw little light on some of the communication limitations of ICT for service users. For example, no service user reported criminal or bullying activities affecting them on-line. There was, however, a strong sense of the way that the technology was shaping social practices and some service users described their growing disadvantage because of lack of access to the internet.

Social processes significantly affected service users’ capacity to access new technologies at the time of this study. It appeared that the widespread social use of mobile phones and the internet is inevitable, but we are only beginning to see it infiltrate to service users, who were often living in extreme poverty. Nevertheless, some service users recognised innovative ways to apply ICT to their social circumstances. Service users said they were willing to use ICT with their workers, as they did in other aspects of their lives. This was particularly the case with young people, who seemed to assume that this was a normal way of communicating. It is important to acknowledge the interest that service users already had in the internet, and the relative speed with which they had taken up the opportunity to use ICT, especially given, and possibly particularly because of, their poverty. Many of the participants in this study had attempted to obtain computers, despite considerable problems of expense and maintenance. Young people were especially interested in using computers, but so also were many of the younger parents. It was only those people over 45 who expressed a lack of interest in computers, although the younger children were uninterested in mobile phones. Where ICT was available, service users had found creative ways to use the affordances of the internet. IM was used actively to solve communication problems, for example, to reduce physical contact with violent partners or to keep dispersed families in contact; and one service user used the internet to start a small business.

Despite service users’ interest, there were considerable barriers to using the internet and mobile phones for communication. This study found that access to and use of the
internet and mobile phones are affected by poverty and by limitations of literacy and age. ICT is expensive for those with limited financial resources and without access to technical support and training. While mobile phone ownership was common, its use was significantly affected by individual financial resources. The use of pre-paid mobiles meant that service users were often unable to be contacted (once their pre-paid fee had been consumed). Internet access by service users was also significantly affected by financial factors, not surprisingly, given the infrastructure costs of internet use:

The diffusion of a physical device (like the one off purchase required for television or radio access) differs from the take-up of a technology like the internet, which requires considerable updating and substantial infrastructure, even after the initial acquisition. In addition, the rapidly changing form of the internet, together with its multiple uses, stresses the need for technological skills, literacy and confidence (Willis & Tranter, 2006 p. 47).

These findings are consistent with other research suggesting that people with low incomes have difficulty accessing the internet from home (Willis & Tranter, 2006).

Where service users took up the affordances of the internet, they did so in ways that were different from social workers, and this potentially could create some problems for communication. While service users used IM, they were less interested in e-mail, whereas social workers preferred using e-mail. These differences have significant implications for child welfare interventions, and further reduce the power of service users. For example, where a social worker only used e-mail, a parent would not be able to communicate with the worker easily. This contrasts with the findings of a recent Australian study of marginalised young people, where youth workers were found to be more actively using e-mail and SMS with service users. This may however, reflect differences in particular sub-groups of service users (Blanchard et al., 2008).

In addition to communication problems, a number of service users felt that the intervention should not be initiated on the internet, and this seemed to relate to findings about the importance of trust in communication for service users. Children, young people and parents in this study seemed to regard ICT-based communication as
appropriate to more established relationships. As in attempts to recruit participants for this study, the issue of needing to have a face-to-face relationship involving trust seemed important. It is unclear how this could change given the rapid growth and reliance on ICT for communication. It may only reflect the way service users currently think of ICT, and this may be different even now for young people.

This present study found individual differences in the use of mobile phones and the internet. Sometimes these differences related to the age and gender of service users. Some of the young people in this study also spoke about changes in the ways they used the internet over time, as they themselves got older. Age and gender do not however, account for all these differences, such as a lack of interest in the internet on the part of some adolescents. Such individual differences among young people are consistent with overseas research, which found that some children did not like using computers (Facer & Furlong, 2001). Other research has uncovered differences related to cultural factors. A recent Australian study has shown that Indigenous people and those from newly-arrived migrant backgrounds had preferences for particular social networking sites (Blanchard et al., 2008).

This study has shown the co-option of ICT by social workers, which has also been described in studies about other areas of social work practice. The limited use of ICT with service users had led to increasing social disadvantage among them. Some service users were not able to contact their social workers because of their workers’ limited access to e-mail or mobile phones. There were also examples of service users becoming increasingly isolated through not having access to the internet. This was the case particularly for young people, but there were also parents who had lost their home-access to computers. Family members were disadvantaged in a community that is becoming increasingly dependent on an expensive technology. Younger parents reported loss of skills and difficulties in maintaining computer literacy when they did not have computers. Young people experienced decreased social and educational opportunities. These are questions of growing social disadvantage that are central to social workers’ professional concerns.
This chapter has also shown the rapidly changing ICT environment for service users in child welfare. Research is poorly developed in child welfare and ICT and, even if available, will rapidly become out of date:

Much of the available literature on the internet and on mobile phones represents the first wave of engagement of young people with ICTs. Research has yet to systematically address significant new moves by young people, as subsequent waves of engagement, which move beyond the “one-way” traffic of “traditional” ICTs ... gradually shift the balance from using the internet as a source of information, to using it primarily to communicate (Wyn, Cuervo, Woodman & Stokes, 2005 p.4).

It is likely that greater research and careful monitoring will be ongoing issues in the use of ICT for communication in child welfare.

8.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided reasons for considering the use of ICT with service users in child welfare case management: firstly, to overcome problems for service users in the current use of pen and paper technology; secondly, to take advantage of the communication potential of the internet and mobile phones; and thirdly, to explore the wider social implications for service users of their limited access to this technology. To date however, ICT has been used largely for information gathering and analysis, rather than for communication in human services. This is not an adequate use of ICT because communication is central to social work practice and because issues of social injustice are adding to vulnerable children’s disadvantage.

This chapter has argued that ICT offers important opportunities to social workers and service users for communication, bringing with it the potential of changes in the genre, production, distribution and consumption of text. It is clear that using ICT with LAC and SCARF is not feasible at this time. Poor access to the internet and mobile phones remains a significant obstacle to using ICT in child welfare. Developing LAC and SCARF to include the use of ICT would require substantial assistance to families to help
with the cost of mobile phone calls, and with access to computer hardware, technical support and protective software (anti-virus, anti-spam, and anti-paedophile). This assistance would need to be ongoing. Voice Over the Internet Protocol (VOIP) may integrate well into internet access in future, further reducing the costs of mobile phone use, and voice recognition software may, once perfected, aid keyboard communication for those with low level literacy.

Even where these obstacles could be overcome, greater understanding of the impact of ICT would be required for use in child welfare. This is particularly the case in relation to differences between workers and service users in the use of ICT, and to the impact of the internet on social work relationships. Using ICT in the development of LAC and SCARF would also require some consideration of how individual differences in the use of ICT would be handled.

Developments in ICT have been (and will probably continue to be) rapid, and the social factors involved in the way ICT could be used with case management are considerable and complex. It is therefore important to monitor these changes in an ongoing way.
Chapter 9
Conclusions on the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF

This chapter synthesises the findings of this study and answers the three research questions. It is in two parts. Firstly, I integrate my findings on service users’ experiences of the aims and processes of case managed interventions (question one), and suggest ways in which ICT could assist in addressing their accounts of those interventions (question two). Secondly, I examine my final research question of how my findings could inform the development of LAC and SCARF (question three).

This chapter addresses immediate policy issues in the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF. The concluding chapter (10) describes the broader implications of the study for child welfare practice, that is, the longer-term issues that will be relevant to the ongoing development of case management.

9.1 AIMS, PROCESSES, AND ICT IN THE REDEVELOPMENT OF LAC AND SCARF

In this first section, I argue that service users’ descriptions of case managed interventions, whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory, could inform the development of LAC and SCARF, although service users’ accounts of their experiences of LAC and SCARF varied widely. ICT may play a role, albeit a limited one, in addressing the issues raised by service users.

Predicting the potential role of ICT in the future of case management, however, can only be speculative. ICT is developed through social processes, mainly external to child welfare interventions, and those processes will shape the future of ICT in ways that cannot be anticipated (this change is likely to be rapid given the experience of the first twenty years of internet access). New applications are developing at a rapid pace; in the course of writing this thesis the use of IM, Skype and Twitter have burgeoned, and these
applications were not even considered by Crystal in his assessment of the internet published in 2006. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, the uses of a particular technology cannot necessarily be predicted from the intentions of its designers. In this chapter, I therefore provide examples of the ways that the internet and mobile phones could be used in child welfare practice only, as a way of clarifying discussion, rather than making definitive suggestions for ICT use.

I have explored how my findings of service users’ experiences could inform the development of LAC and SCARF, and the use of ICT in three areas: the aims of child welfare interventions, the social work processes (both planning and altered power relations), and the use of written text. I then consider an important caveat on any developments in case management; that is, the need to improve service users’ access to ICT.

9.1.1 Social work aims and ICT

Although many service users appreciated the help that they received from their social workers, the aims of the interventions were sometimes problematic for families. The use of ICT in conjunction with a case management system could have a limited effect on addressing these problem areas. ICT could increase the effectiveness of assessing assistance and lessen the capacity of workers to control the behaviour of service users.

Many service users found the social work aims of LAC and SCARF satisfactory, in that the intervention provided assistance to help young people grow up, or parents to rear their children at a ‘community standard’. Many service users did not describe feeling that their behaviour was inappropriately controlled, and said they felt comfortable with workers’ values. (An important limitation of this study, however, is that only those who were still in contact with their agencies and thus perhaps more likely to describe better experiences, were able to be included in this study). Such experiences indicate that little change may be required in LAC and SCARF to meet most service users’ requirements. Nevertheless, some service users did express disappointment with the social workers’ goals for the intervention and identified areas where assistance could be improved. Disagreement over the aims of assistance led to three service users significantly limiting
their engagement with social workers. As will be discussed below, these could not be negotiated to a satisfactory conclusion. In addition, a small number of SCARF users criticised the intervention for not adequately assessing family poverty and the issues caused by extended family relationships in a child’s welfare. Furthermore, case managed interventions did not satisfy some service users’ needs for specialised assistance. SCARF, and to a lesser extent LAC, also allowed workers’ values to intrude in ways that service users sometimes believed were unwarranted.

An additional area of disappointment, in this case specifically for young people, involved the understanding of childhood embodied in LAC and SCARF. Young people identified three areas of concern. Firstly, they spoke of wanting social and emotional support after eighteen years of age, even though the case management systems were not used after the legal age of independence. Secondly, some young people wanted their views considered separately from their parents, and objected when instructions in SCARF were not implemented by their social workers. Thirdly, a number of young people were concerned by stereotyped views of their behaviour based on their age.

These findings provide a basis for considering how case management systems could be altered to better meet issues of concern to service users. Changes in technology, when used in conjunction with case management systems, are however, likely to have only a limited effect. This is because discourses of social work and childhood are strongly contested and implicated in the control of the behaviour of families and children, and will concern issues involving the forceful exercise of power.

Despite this overall caveat, ICT used in particular ways could alter social work goals by enabling service users to have efficient access to available assistance. Assistance could be enhanced by increasing emotional support, because of improvements in the ease of contact between workers and service users. Mobile phones (Hoyles & Tregeagle, 2007) and the internet (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004; Blanchard et al., 2008) have been shown to have potential to increase emotional support in the general community and in some welfare interventions. Social support could be increased for service users by reducing social isolation, and allowing social workers to reach out to service users more readily (Hoyles
& Tregeagle, 2007). Service users’ ability to initiate communication through the use of ICT could better identify where and when assistance is needed. It may be easier for service users to use mobile phones and the internet to initiate contact with their social workers, rather than just having face-to-face contact initiated by social workers, as the situation has been to the present time. The development of insight could also be enhanced by using ICT, as computer-mediated communication could encourage more self-reflection than the current pen and paper systems. This is because of the user-friendly genre of internet websites, easier distribution of forms, and the ability of service users to use the case management forms when they felt reflective. Finally, access to information could be enhanced by greater use of websites. The internet could assist in addressing the problem of insufficient specialised information identified in this study (although the choice of reference websites could be a way of social workers attempting to shape service users’ behaviour).

ICT could also change opportunities for social workers to control service users’ behaviour. Control could be altered in two ways. Firstly, control could be altered through reducing intrusion of workers’ values by allowing service users to access forms independently on-line. Secondly, control could be altered by challenging social workers’ concepts of childhood by having a technology that young people liked to use. Workers’ observation of young people’s competency with technology is likely to confront views that children are less competent than adults. ICT has a potentially creative and constructive role in contributing to the assessment and provision of assistance, and the way control may be exercised in case managed interventions.

9.1.2 Planning processes, power relations and ICT

Some planning processes and aspects of power relations in LAC and SCARF-based interventions were problematic from the service user perspective. These areas of concern may provide a basis for change in case management systems.

Overall, service users described the process most important to them in bringing about change in their lives was a ‘positive relationship’ with their worker, and this often occurred within case managed interventions. It was difficult in this study to identify the
link between relationships (between service users and social workers) and the planning processes. Service users associated positive relations with reliability, empathy and trust but were most likely to view these attributes as the result of the personal qualities of the workers. Service users did not associate these attributes with the case management system, except in a few situations where they directly identified workers’ reliability as linked to the use of forms. Service users could have been responding to the planning processes designed into LAC and SCARF, but they did not describe this as a causal relationship, and it is difficult therefore to say how service users may want to alter planning processes in LAC and SCARF. What can be said with relative certainty is that the planning processes in case management systems do not seem generally to significantly inhibit the development of valued relationships between social workers and service users (contrary to the opinions of commentators such as Garrett, 2003a). The findings also indicate that those features of LAC and SCARF that do contribute to reliability and contact with workers should be maintained.

The use of LAC and SCARF did appear to offer opportunities for service users to exercise power through the written text, and textual features did affect the number of opportunities to participate. The findings, however, also indicated that not all service users were satisfied with their ability to exercise power in the intervention, as they were, at times, significantly disappointed at the outcomes of negotiations, or did not trust their workers initially. These dissatisfactions may warrant changes in LAC and SCARF in addressing three significant issues: firstly, to increase the forms’ effectiveness in restricting social workers’ ability to exercise power, secondly, to acknowledge the ‘productive’ use of power experienced by service users, and thirdly, to restrict power relations external to the intervention, especially those suppressing the voices of young people. Examples of the types of changes may include greater acknowledgement of the time taken to negotiate outcomes, and clearer recognition of the influence of external power. The case management systems could also acknowledge the ways in which decisions are made in child welfare interventions, and the compromises involved in resolving issues. For example, currently the LAC and SCARF forms only record parents’ agreement, but not the complex pressures leading to decisions. One mother in this study movingly described the problem of signing the LAC forms to indicate that she
‘agreed’ to her son’s removal from her care, but she was given no opportunity to say that she loved him, did not want to be separated from him, and that effectively she had had no choice about his removal to foster care. In such situations, service users may need greater scope for recording their ambivalence and distress at such decisions, and the social pressures on them.

The use of ICT may have some impact on planning processes and power relations between social workers and service users. The internet could bring efficiency to planning, by affecting time frames, decision making or agency coordination. The greater use of mobile phones and IM could enhance the potential for reliability by allowing for more contact between social workers and service users at times dictated by families. ICT could assist in making organisation of reviews easier by allowing easier communication for service users, for example by allowing communication in ways other than face-to-face contact. IM may enable more communication for young people who do not get to see social workers (for example, if children are at school). Furthermore, ICT could allow service users to complete the LAC and SCARF forms over the longer term, and allow them to examine issues in their own time frames.

The use of ICT may also affect power relations between service users and social workers in child welfare interventions. ICT may have some influence on power because it limits social workers’ opportunities to control communication. The internet could increase opportunities for service users to participate, and restrict social workers’ ability to control these opportunities. Any attempts at altering power relations, however, are likely to be strongly contested because they involve social control of families.

Any application of ICT to LAC and SCARF must take into account the study’s finding that service users felt that negotiations and relationships were important to service users and must not be lessened. There remain many questions about the role of ICT in child welfare relationships which require further research. For example, there is little understanding of how relations are developed on-line, and the level of face-to-face contact required for a social work relationship, and what mix of these two types of communication is compatible with outcomes acceptable to service users. Research (Ben-
Ze'ev, 2004) indicates that some aspects of computer-mediated communication would encourage greater self-disclosure by service users and lead to more intense relationships (as in on-line dating). But how appropriate this is to the child welfare intervention is uncertain, as deception may be easier on-line, although deception must also be acknowledged as a problem in current child welfare practice (Parton, 2004).

9.1.3 Service users, written texts and ICT

Service users were mostly either critical or ambivalent about the LAC and SCARF forms, or alternatively they were not aware of the forms at all. It is in this area that ICT may offer an important contribution to children’s welfare.

When service users did recognise LAC and SCARF forms, most said they had difficulties with them. Children, young people and parents clearly identified LAC and SCARF as belonging to the welfare organisation, and overwhelmingly responded to the bureaucratic nature of the forms. It is possible that for this reason, it often came as a surprise to them that the forms could help them to develop insight. Nonetheless, the literacy requirements of the forms did create problems for service users, who felt intimidated by their bulky size, and resented the imposition of the forms’ structure and repetitive nature. The forms also currently require a service user to be organised, and service users said they had problems keeping the forms and maintaining privacy within families. The forms were also reminders of emotionally disturbing events.

ICT used in conjunction with case management may overcome some of the problems of paper-based forms. ICT was the medium of choice for communication for many young people and for most of the parents in this study. Service users said they liked the colour, the interactive nature and the ‘feel’ of the internet. Literacy requirements are lower on the internet than in traditional modes of written communication, and service users who did not find the process of reading and writing easy on paper found the use of the internet to be relatively unproblematic. The capacity to personalise web-sites (perhaps with a picture of the young person such as in Face Book) could also offer future opportunities for service users to identify with case management records. Websites could enable information to be easier to find than existing ways of getting information,
‘Drilling down’ through ‘layers’ of data on internet sites may make access for service users easier. On the internet, there may be a reduced likelihood of encountering unwanted reminders of past events than when paper forms are used. If LAC and SCARF forms were password protected, family members may not be able to discover forms by accident, and there would be a decreased risk of damage or permanent loss of the forms (although attention would need to be given to updating the technologies by which they were maintained).

For the group of service users who had little or no recognition of SCARF forms, the use of ICT may also bring considerable change. Control over paper-based forms by social workers means that case management in paper-based forms is initiated at workers discretion and at times and places set to suit them. The use of the internet could allow service users to initiate the production of written text, and hence reduce social workers’ control over these opportunities and allow written records to be better distributed.

9.1.4 Service users’ ability to use ICT

Before ICT could be used in conjunction with redevelopment of LAC and SCARF, significant barriers to service users employing ICT would need to be overcome. Many, but not all, service users were open to using ICT with their social workers. They owned mobile phones and were keen to have computers and use the internet. The majority of young people and parents found communication over the internet attractive and convenient and felt it addressed problems such as keeping copies of forms. Over two-thirds of the service users in this study however, were not currently likely to communicate with their workers using ICT. In relation to mobile phones, service users could not afford to make return phone calls, and there were others who did not use them at all. In relation to the internet, there were a number of barriers. Firstly, most service users could not afford the expense of computers, software and internet connections. Secondly, there were individual differences of ‘personal interest’ in using the technology, and many service users used different internet applications than from those used by social workers. Thirdly, social workers’ lack an adequate understanding of online communication. Noticeably, service users were reluctant to use computer-mediated
communication in the early stages of the intervention, and it appeared that a level of trust was needed before service users would use ICT with social workers.

The findings of this study also indicated that social workers were currently reluctant to use ICT with service users - they did not do so even when the internet was available to service users, and there were instances when they did not give service users their mobile phone numbers. The reasons for this are not clear and require further research. It may be that social workers’ ‘duty of care’ to ensure the wellbeing of children is a barrier to using ICT, because of the potential dangers of the internet, or because of their limited understanding of the effect of computer-mediated communication. This thesis has also argued that social workers and managers have co-opted ICT for their own professional reasons, and they may be reluctant to give up their dominance of it.

The following chapter explores the substantial longer-term changes that would be required if social work practice is to overcome these problems and use ICT in child welfare interventions. These changes include the need for social workers to examine their own use of power and the way they have co-opted ICT, or failed to address service user access (with a resulting decrease in service users’ opportunities to exercise power). Recognising the future potential of ICT in child welfare practice also means that social workers would need to pro-actively address the question of how computer-mediated communication would affect child welfare practice.

9.2 THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

The second section of this chapter explores how the study findings could contribute to children’s welfare. I will examine the possibility of change to LAC and SCARF to reflect service users’ experiences, given what the study has shown about the pressures for change on LAC and SCARF, the likely constraints on that change, and the power relations operating in child welfare services. As with speculation about the future of technology, it is not possible to anticipate the outcomes of negotiations over the development of case management, and I therefore can speculate.
The theoretical approach taken in this study conceptualised case management systems as texts that embodied discourses, and consequently, changes to LAC and SCARF must be understood in terms of changes in discourse. In considering change to discourses relevant to case management, I will draw on two distinct aspects of Foucault’s thinking. Firstly, I draw on Foucault’s concept of ‘rules of formation’ in which any change to LAC and SCARF would be constrained within ‘orders of discourse’. I will also draw on Foucault’s concept, developed later in his thinking, of power as significant in discursive change. I will utilise both aspects of Foucault’s theory, supplementing my consideration of ‘orders of discourse’, to consider how power relations operating in child welfare interventions may affect the development of LAC and SCARF.

9.2.1 Change as constrained but inevitable

This study has identified the discourses embodied in LAC and SCARF as those of social work, management, and childhood, as well as the wider social tendencies toward technologisation and democratisation. It is likely that these five key discourses and tendencies will be central to further development of case management systems, and that they will constrain, but also make inevitable, ongoing changes.

There are indications of the changes, which may affect LAC and SCARF in the development of these systems, since their implementation. Social work discourse has been subject to ongoing negotiation since the beginning of the profession, over what constitutes ‘assistance’ and ‘control’ and LAC and SCARF can be seen as attempts to swing child welfare practice away from emphasising control, and focusing on greater assistance (although maintaining elements of both). Management discourse is strongly embodied in LAC and SCARF, and becoming increasingly important in human service delivery (although strongly challenged by social workers concerned with professionalism). The discourse about childhood has also shifted substantially during the introduction and implementation of LAC and SCARF. Traditional concepts of developmentalism have come under considerable challenge from the new children’s paradigm. Furthermore, LAC and SCARF embody shifts in societal orders of discourse that continue to change. Since the 1970s and 1980s there has been increased pressure for democratisation in child welfare, albeit alongside what critics would describe as greater
control with the strengthening of governmentality. In addition, there is a trend to a more deliberate use of texts to affect social processes. These substantial shifts in the discourses in which LAC and SCARF were conceived are likely to remain important in the immediate future. Change in these discourses is also likely to be ongoing, although the exact nature of these developments is unpredictable.

9.2.2 The impact of power relations on the development of LAC and SCARF

When considering changes to LAC and SCARF, Foucault’s theories suggest that the role of power is important in understanding which knowledge may become dominant as discourses change. This section considers the findings of my study on power relations involved in the development of LAC and SCARF. The site for this negotiation will most likely be the LAC Project, and I explore the way that power could be exercised in this setting. I also consider how service users’ ‘subject positions’ could be incorporated into the development through alliances with others in the process of redevelopment.

9.2.2.1 The highly contested process of LAC and SCARF development

Change in LAC and SCARF is likely to be highly contested because, as governmentality theorists contend, child welfare is an important ‘site’ for the control of the family, and thus for the governing of modern societies. The range of people contesting the development of such systems is likely to be wide. Individuals and groups with interests in case management include: social workers, government bureaucrats, non-government agencies, children, parents, administrative workers, managers, researchers, and the wider society (particularly through the influence of the media). The social work literature, reviewed in Chapter 2, identified some of the subject positions of social workers that are relevant to the development of LAC and SCARF. This is not however; a comprehensive assessment of all the subject positions relevant to the development of LAC and SCARF, and more research will be needed on carers and workers.

Examination of the case management systems in the first ten years of their implementation shows that LAC and SCARF have already been affected by changing
power relations. For example, the use of case management for data collection reflects the power of researchers (as in Canada) and of bureaucrats (in Victoria). In these situations, individuals who have already effectively exercised power have been able to co-opt the case management systems to further increase their own power.

9.2.2.2 Opportunities for service users to exercise power in development

There is currently little opportunity for service users’ experiences to be heard in the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF. Such opportunities need to be developed and extended to diverse groups of service users over the long term.

There are considerable barriers to extending these opportunities to service users. For example, opportunities may be resisted by some social workers, and Ife (1997) has warned of the general opposition of social workers to community-based approaches to human service delivery. Service users might also find it difficult to take advantage of opportunities to participate. There were many examples in this study, of restrictions to service users being able to ‘voice’ their views. Poverty and literacy levels clearly affected service users’ abilities to take up participation opportunities. Children and young people may have a limited voice because of the power of adults and other gatekeepers.

The opportunities for service users to influence the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF may be best located in non-government agencies in partnership with universities, rather than in government bureaucracies. LAC and SCARF have been sponsored by non-government agencies and social work academics, and some of these groups have shown themselves to be open to service user participation. Where development has occurred in large government bureaucracies, such as happened in the United Kingdom and in Victoria, there have been strong managerial pressures, which appear to have not led to service user participation. A few non-government agencies have shown themselves to be interested in service users’ experiences. The development of this industry partnership and finding participants for this study are manifestations of this interest.

Negotiation over the development of LAC and SCARF will most likely occur in the LAC Project. Service users’ best opportunity to influence the development of LAC and
SCARF must therefore be linked to the LAC Project managers who currently exercise the most immediate power in the development of case management systems. These managers are predominantly from social work training backgrounds, working in child welfare agencies using LAC and SCARF, and with responsibility for marketing the case management systems to other social workers and governments. Their personal views on aims, processes, power relations, and the use of text and ICT will vary; nevertheless, changes which reflect service users’ experiences thus far should be possible.

The social worker advocates of case management, such as the LAC Project managers, may be interested in service users’ views of the ways in which the case management systems understand assessment, and may be open to alteration in assessment of poverty, family relations, and the extent of assistance offered in areas identified by service users. The LAC Project managers may embrace changes in the nature of the assessment process, and may be able to make use of LAC more flexible in stable long-term placements. They are likely to be interested in addressing those areas where service users have resisted attempts at control, or found questions intrusive for example, by re-examining questions that service users failed to answer openly about substance use and criminal behaviour. Alterations to the relevant questions in LAC and SCARF may prove difficult to achieve as the subject areas affect a wide range of social interests. The LAC Project managers may be open to reconsidering the concepts of childhood underpinning LAC and SCARF, in the light of the findings in this study that the current view restricted participation of younger service users. For example, it may be possible to introduce a form for consultation of young people using SCARF (as currently in LAC). The use of age bands to determine goals for child development requires re-examination, and consideration needs to be given to some means of extending services to those over eighteen (although this will depend on wider social attitudes towards prolonging the dependency of young people, and the resources allocated that governments are prepared to allocate). (Here it is worth noting, that children not involved in welfare care remain living at home are often dependent on social support well into their twenties). The LAC Project managers may be interested in altering the planning processes of LAC and SCARF, in order to increase contact with social workers, and professional reliability. They are likely to be open to reconsidering the ways in which power relations have been
conceptualised, given that this study found that their objectives of better informing the intervention were not achieved. Given the barriers of written text to service users’ participation identified in this study, managers may be willing to reconsider features of the text. The LAC Project managers could embrace the use of ICT to overcome some of the paper-based barriers to service users’ participation. They may also be interested in addressing social justice issues for service users caused by families’ limited access to the internet. The LAC Project managers may also consider their role as social workers in addressing issues of educating service users about ICT.

9.2.3 Opportunities to change LAC and SCARF

Although it is difficult to predict changes in orders of discourse, or in the resolution of power relations in the development of LAC and SCARF, it is certain that any change will require the provision of ongoing opportunities for service users to influence the process of redevelopment.

In Foucault’s view, discourses are open to resistance and rarely able to achieve total dominance. This instability allows for the possibility of affecting the development of LAC and SCARF through:

... looking for weak spots, contradictions, ruptures, discontinuities and cracks in systems of representation, and converting these into moments of negotiation and possibilities through the use of whatever resources are available (Kenway et al., 1994 p.144)

There are many possible areas where change could occur, and changes in the discourses of social work, management, childhood, democratisation and technologisation, and the way they combine, may provide such openings. There are also situations in which discourses appear to contradict one another. For example, tendencies toward democratisation are at odds with the increase of social workers’ control through technologisation (Fairclough, 1992). In other areas, discourses may complement and reinforce one another in ways that could also lead to change. For example, greater participation of children could be reinforced by practices in ICT that allow a range of levels of literacy. Discourses may be altered by changes in non-discursive factors such
as new affordances of ICT. Furthermore, text can have a powerful impact on social practices, and conscious alteration of written text will be an important tool in any change to LAC and SCARF. Texts are an important part of any strategy to include service users’ positioning and subjugated knowledge in the redevelopment of LAC and SCARF. Changes in texts may also occur because of a shift in technology, such as the use of websites.

Opportunities to alter discourses to reflect the experiences of service users will need to be ongoing, since the operation of power/knowledge in child welfare will be constantly changing. Foucault (as cited in Rabinow, 1984 p.344) acknowledges the ongoing need to monitor change in his own work on mental health services:

> I think that the ethico-political choice we have to determine every day is to determine which the main danger is. [In criticising anti-psychiatry] that does not mean that we were not right to criticise those mental hospitals. I think it was good to do that because they were the danger. And now it is quite clear that the danger has changed ... and there are now new problems

It will thus be important to re-examine service users’ experiences, and monitor them over time.

### 9.3 CONCLUSION

The development of LAC and SCARF can be usefully informed by service users’ experiences of both case management systems and ICT. In this study, service users have been shown to hold a wide variety of positions, many of which were uncritical of the case management systems. Some service users identified areas where change would be warranted in LAC and SCARF. ICT may have a limited role in the development of case management. Growing use of ICT in child welfare may be inevitable. Some of the changes identified through these studies will be highly contested, and the discourses influenced by wider societal ‘orders of discourse’ and changes occurring in these. Furthermore, social processes related to service users and ICT continue to limit access to technology for many individuals, and to affect the use that they may make of a technology. The impact of power may mean that those with least opportunity to exercise
power become increasingly disadvantaged in an environment characterised by rapidly changing technology.

Change in case management, including its use of ICT, will be inevitable, as the orders of discourse relevant to LAC and SCARF change, but there is a danger that this process of change could further subjugate service users’ knowledge because of the relatively limited opportunities for children, young people and their parents to exercise power. In order to promote service users’ knowledge, policy makers must first find opportunities for them to exercise power in this negotiation about change, and to find ways in which to understand their voices. This is ultimately important in regard to the outcomes of interventions.
Chapter 10

Conclusions on the ongoing development of case management in Australia

This concluding chapter identifies the key findings of this study for social work practice with vulnerable children requiring child welfare services in Australia. The previous chapter synthesised the findings on the three research questions. It explored service users’ experiences of LAC and SCARF; it investigated how ICT could address issues arising for service users, and examined how these findings could inform the development of LAC and SCARF. This chapter is broader in scope than the immediate policy implications of the study for the development of LAC and SCARF. It considers the implications of the findings of this study for social work knowledge in the area of child welfare — the context for the longer-term development of case management systems.

The issues central to this study are of great practical significance, and raise critical questions for social workers in the area of child welfare. These include: what is the importance of service users in the construction of child welfare ‘knowledge’, how can social workers overcome the current stalemate within academic debate on the ways to respond to vulnerable children and young people, and what is the impact of ‘technologisation’ in meeting children’s needs? This study also raises the question: what use could be made of the considerable changes that ICT could bring to communication in child welfare?

10.1 SIGNIFICANCE FOR VULNERABLE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN

This study is significant for the welfare of a large and growing number of Australia’s most vulnerable children. There are over 28,000 Australian children and young people
who live in out of home care (the official statistic for any one night), and official statistics show that over 58,000 children and young people are abused and neglected each year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006-7, 2008). The ongoing development of case management systems is important to these children and young people, as these systems were designed as a response to failure of other attempts at reform. Many Australian social work academics and agencies, hoped that these systems would have a direct and beneficial impact on child welfare services. These case management systems were intended to address the problem of poor integration of research findings into social work practice. The systems reflected local interest in permanency planning: in the way they address prevention of out of home care placements, ensure that decisions were time-limited, and encourage active planning for children. The systems were intended to address problems of interagency collaboration, an issue particularly relevant to Australia’s fragmented service-delivery systems. Furthermore, LAC and SCARF were attempts to alter power relations in a way that has resonance with local concerns about low levels of participation on the part of service users. The systems’ capacities for recording and collating data were also of interest to many academics, researchers and managers, who were concerned with a wide range of issues from the conduct of the individual intervention, to national policy-making. The introduction of case management systems to Australia was similar to the situation in Canada - a ‘grassroots’ attempt to reform state-based welfare systems in the absence of central government leadership (Kufeldt, 2005).

This thesis comes at a critical juncture in the redevelopment of case management in Australia. LAC and SCARF were still largely based on systems conceived in the 1980s in a different service system (the UK) from their current Australian setting, and over time, the context of practice had changed. Sufficient time had elapsed to warrant assessment of service users’ experiences—as it is only in established practice, where service users had completed welfare interventions, that the systems can be effectively reviewed. Problems had had time to emerge. It was clear that not all State and Territory governments were adopting these systems. Furthermore, there were emerging changes in the systems that needed to be considered. For all these reasons, Barnardos Australia initiated this study in conjunction with the University of Western Sydney.
This thesis argues that the context in which child welfare practice must move forward requires better understanding of service user knowledge, resolution of social worker divided knowledge about child welfare, the active consideration of the effect of ICT in child welfare practice, and new approaches to understanding service users’ experiences.

10.2 SERVICE USERS’ CRITICAL ROLE IN CONSTRUCTING CHILD WELFARE KNOWLEDGE

This thesis has argued that service users can provide unique understandings of child welfare interventions and it is critical to incorporate service users’ knowledge in individual child welfare interventions and the development of case management. I argue that opportunities must be found to allow service users to be involved in the process of development of social work knowledge, and that further research is needed.

This study has shown that service users’ knowledge is significantly different both from that of the ‘expert’ authors of the case management systems, and from that of their critics. Service users’ descriptions of their experiences have raised questions about the ways social workers understand assistance, and how they assess service users’ circumstances. Young people have experienced difficulties with social workers’ understanding of childhood: the needs of those over 18 and of those living with their own families have been particularly problematic. (There are also outstanding questions about the participation of those very young children who were excluded from the case managed interventions and from this study). Service users have also questioned the processes used in interventions, and highlighted the limitations of social workers’ understandings of the power relations operating in the interventions. These issues have very practical implications because service users currently don’t always inform social workers in the ways the authors of the systems assumed they would. Service users’ knowledge is highly diverse, and this needs to be incorporated in case management systems. This study has shown that there are substantial variations both between individuals, and between ‘groups’ of service users.
10.3 CONTESTED KNOWLEDGE AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS

This study has also highlighted the enormous division in ‘knowledge’ among social workers over how to intervene to ensure the welfare of children. Not just over case management generally, but on each of the discourses vital to child welfare practice. This situation has implications, not only for the development of case management, but for families who may experience very different approaches to social work, depending on the agency or worker that they are involved with. Healy (2005, pp.95-96) points to the importance of ongoing development of theory for the benefit of service users, employers and funding bodies and, the need for development of service quality and the social work profession itself. The fractured theoretical base of social work in the area of child welfare is most prominent in relation to division over the aims and processes of interventions, and to the limited consideration of discourses of childhood, democratisation and technologisation by the profession. This thesis has shown that current polarised positions in the social work literature on LAC and SCARF do not reflect the complexity of child welfare intervention experienced by service users, and that including service users’ knowledge may assist in overcoming the current stalemate in child welfare theory.

10.3.1 Debate among social workers over the aims and processes of interventions

The social work literature on LAC and SCARF has shown that social workers are strongly divided on the aims and processes of interventions involving children living in out of home care, or who are ‘in need’ in their own families. Some social workers have embraced the use of case management, while others, particularly in the United Kingdom, have rejected this approach, seeing LAC and SCARF both as a threat to the profession, and as a new and more invidious technique to control families. Viewing LAC and SCARF in terms of either assistance or control, or in terms of managerialism versus professional accountability, however, does not ‘do justice’ to the complexity of social work interventions.
Debates over assistance and control have been central to social work discourse since the beginning of the profession, and this debate remains significantly polarised in current practice. Academic advocates of LAC and SCARF, who have appreciated the increased level of assistance provided to families and the retreat from child protection ‘policing’ policies, have not debated the impact of LAC and SCARF on behavioural control. For example, there has been little attempt in the literature on LAC and SCARF to engage with arguments that case management is a form of governmentality, concerned with social norms and ‘self-policing’ through subjectification. Critics of LAC and SCARF have similarly not acknowledged the importance of the increased assistance to service users. Neither group has considered the low level of assistance that was a problem for many parents in this study. Commentators have also failed to explore service users’ capacity to exercise their own power and resist attempts at control. I argue that acknowledgement of the complex negotiation of assistance and control in social work may assist in determining a way forward in child welfare practice.

Debate over the processes of child welfare interventions is also polarised. The influence of management discourse has been central to child welfare commentary for at least the last twenty years in the debate over ‘permanency planning’, yet ways to achieve change remain unresolved. Those advocating the use of case management have not addressed the concerns of critics about the impact of planning on the social work relationship. For example, commentary on LAC and SCARF has not acknowledged the potential impact of managerial techniques on social work practice, such as the impact of data collection in the shaping of interventions (Tilbury, 2004). On the other hand, critics of the case management approach have shown little recognition of addressing problems with planning in professional interventions such as those pointed out in Chapter 1 (that is, that many Australian children are rarely visited by their social workers, and there is little evidence of children even knowing their worker’s name). I argue that greater understanding of planning processes in child welfare intervention is needed.
10.3.2 Limited critique of concepts of childhood, democratisation and technologisation

Social workers in child welfare are affected by changes in discourses and tendencies in societal orders of discourse affecting the wider community, but there has been limited debate about the impact of these changes in literature on LAC and SCARF. The three most significant are changes in the concept of childhood, democratisation and technologisation. Here, there is frequently a consensus among social workers, but this consensus is at odds with service users’ descriptions of their experiences.

The LAC and SCARF authors and their critics, as well as the adult service users, have largely accepted the dominant developmentalist approaches to childhood embodied in these systems. The impact of the new children’s paradigm is not an issue for extensive debate (although Garrett, 2003 and Winter, 2006 do raise some limited questions). Yet developmentalism was a problem for young people to the extent that it restricted their capacity to participate. Moreover, the developmentalist approach has led to younger children and young people living with their parents being excluded from participatory strategies. The definition of childhood, as a legal status, also led to two young people in this study being significantly alienated from assistance by social workers.

LAC and SCARF were designed to increase democratisation, and the literature on LAC and SCARF contains only limited debate about the ways in which this has been implemented. Social workers have been relatively accepting of the increased participation of service users in LAC and SCARF, but this seeming acceptance is inconsistent with the experiences of service users. Yet the inadequacy of the hierarchical concept of power used in LAC and SCARF has not been questioned, nor have the categories of individuals included or the motivation for change been explored. I have argued that the experiences of service users have shown the need for greater debate on these issues in child welfare practice.

The debate about the role of written text in child welfare case management also requires further interrogation. The authors and developers of LAC and SCARF do not address the question of how service users experience the extensive use of written text in child...
welfare interventions. The systems’ authors claim that transparent and standardised recording has opened workers to increased scrutiny by managers, other workers and service users. The greater use of standardised texts has also increased the capacity for data collection, and the ability to commodify social work knowledge. Advocates of the use of written text have not acknowledged this, nor the findings of the implementation studies, which describe the resulting difficulties for service users. Critics, for their part, have not acknowledged any positive elements of the use of recording, such as the significance of ‘external’ expertise to aid inexperienced workers, or the importance of standardised recording systems in helping to assess outcomes.

Consideration of written texts is important for all social workers, as they are inevitably involved in record-keeping. Pen and paper technology is taken for granted with little attention paid to the impact this has on power relations in interventions. Yet this study has shown the critical importance of who initiates and distributes texts, and the important role that the interpretation of texts plays in the development of insight. Social workers generally need to be more conscious of the impact of written text in their practice, and of the implications for the exercise of power of who controls the production and distribution of text.

10.3.3 The importance of time and place

Consistent with social constructionist theory, this study has highlighted the significance of time and place in the construction of social workers’ knowledge, and points to the importance of recognising local knowledge in child welfare practice. There have been different responses to the case management systems in Australia and the United Kingdom, and there is a growing divergence in approaches to child welfare between the two countries. Some Australian social workers have identified aspects of case management systems as important to Australian services because of local service conditions. It is ironic that many social workers in the United Kingdom are concerned about an excessive government pre-occupation with the collection of data, while many Australian social workers want governments to collect and analyse data more actively (CAFWAA, 2007b). These differences appear to be increasing over time, as evidenced by the fact that LAC has been accepted by a number of States and agencies in Australia.
Significantly, the integration of LAC and the Assessment Framework in the United Kingdom, the ICS, has been rejected by the LAC Project as a direction for Australian child welfare practice.

One significant factor accounting for the differences in social work practice is the role government plays in each country. In the United Kingdom, where central government interest in case management has been strong and linked to the collection of data, the response of social workers has focused on the threat to the profession and to the freedom of families. In Australia, where governmental interest in child welfare is fragmented and central government does not take a strong leadership role, these concerns have not been deemed relevant. This situation in Australia appears more similar to the Canadian experience in which child welfare administration is also the responsibility of provincial governments.

Developers of case management in child welfare need to acknowledge such local differences, and to maintain a focus on Australian circumstances in the development of LAC and SCARF. Overseas studies may be of increasingly limited value to Australia because of differences in the ways the systems have been used, and in the variable nature of service systems.

10.4 ICT IN CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

This thesis has highlighted the limited interest of social workers in exploring the communication ‘affordances’ of ICT in child welfare practice, and shown that social workers have, as yet, not critically examined their own use of ICT. The response to ICT in the social work literature has been largely defined by United Kingdom academics, who are concerned about managerialism rather than the communication possibilities afforded by ICT (Parton, 2008; Garrett, 2004; Munro 2005). I have argued that social workers have used ICT to exercise or maintain their own power, but that the potential advantages of ICT for service users have been neglected. It is not satisfactory that a profession based on communication, has ignored the communication revolution occurring in the wider community.
The findings of this study with service users, together with commentary from a wide range of other disciplines, indicate that ICT could be usefully employed in social work practice for communication purposes.

Increased use of ICT with service users would also require reflection on the co-option of ICT by social workers and managers. Accounts in this study of workers using ICT but not extending this to service users indicate that social workers might be reluctant to share this resource. Although only a limited step, it would be a positive contribution to children’s welfare.

Social workers must also address the need for further research into the impact of ICT in social work communication. There are a number of potential issues, such as the impact of imagination, image-management, the possibility of deceit, and on-line ‘flaring’ (loss of temper). In addition, on-line communication could mean that social workers do not have adequate face-to-face contact with service users (although developments in ICT such as visual internet access webcams may be of some help in addressing this limitation). It is also possible that introducing ICT to service users could compromise the welfare of children in some circumstances. The internet is a potential source of harm for children because of on-line bullying, pornography and paedophiles’ access to children. Commentators also identify the problem of loss of privacy, ‘information overload’, potential for commercial exploitation on-line, and the ease with which individuals can become caught by the artificial on-line identity that they may have created for themselves (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). There are also individual differences in the use of the internet that may limit the usefulness of ICT, and interfere with communication with service users who do not use ICT. None of the existing research was specific to social work or child welfare practice, and specialist information is needed before social workers can feel confident enough to use ICT in interventions.

Using ICT in child welfare would require social workers to confront the issue of vulnerable children’s limited access to ICT. Service users in this study (who it could be argued were the most disadvantaged of the disadvantaged), had considerably less access than the general community, even less than those on welfare income (McLaren &
Zappala, 2002) and marginalised young people (Blanchard et al., 2008). Only a minority of service users in this study had access to the internet, and despite their interest, there were substantial economic barriers to using mobile phones, computers and internet service providers. This was a complex issue that went beyond the acquisition of hardware: many service users had lost access to their home computers because of their social circumstances. Two-thirds of service users did not have access to the internet. Mobile phone use was also very limited (although access to mobile phones themselves was not). Most service users could not afford extensive use of their mobile phones.

Importantly, this study has also alerted social workers to the fact that even where ICT is available, service users employed ICT differently from them. Children, young people and their parents do not rely on email, for example, as social workers have been shown to. Social workers also need to question their own apparently innocuous use of mobile phones and e-mail communication, when service users cannot use that technology easily to contact them.

These findings present a considerable challenge to social workers. Although the ‘digital divide’ is widely seen to be reducing in the general community, users of child welfare services remain heavily disenfranchised. This raises the problems of social justice in a community increasingly reliant on ICT for communication. Unless social workers address this issue, there is a danger that they will actually contribute to increasing social injustice. Use of ICT in case management is one way of addressing this issue.

10.5 THE CHALLENGE OF RESEARCH WITH CHILD WELFARE SERVICE USERS

The increasing emphasis on service users in the construction of social work knowledge, advocated above, means that increased attention is needed to identify ways to understand the experiences of children, young people and parents using welfare services. For example, this study has described many problems in early studies of service users’ experiences of LAC and SCARF. These early studies and future studies also face challenges because of the need to negotiate power in any study involving
service users. Existing studies on case management were limited in many ways: the numbers of participants were small, the types of participants limited and the methodologies unspecified. There was often insufficient consideration given to the role of power in the research setting in subjugating service user knowledge. For example, participants may have been unwilling to speak because they were still dependent on welfare agencies for services, or because of adult control over the research process. This study attempted to develop research methods suited to service users who were likely to have their knowledge subjugated in the research setting. Dealing with this problem, however, presented ongoing challenges.

10.5.1 The contribution of social constructionism as an approach to understanding service users

In this thesis, I have argued that social constructionism has proved a useful basis for research in social work in the area of child welfare. Social constructionism is not necessarily accepted in social work theory generally. McDonald (2006) for example, identifies that it has the potential to undermine the profession’s intellectual heritage, silence advocates for change, and challenge Marxist and feminist ‘grand narratives’ in ways that may undermine practice. This approach has, however, proved fertile in understanding child welfare knowledge to be contingent, changing and contested. Social constructionist theories, particularly those of Michel Foucault, have proved useful in understanding social work knowledge and how it may change. Fairclough’s focus on the importance of text in social change has been significant in understanding past, current and future use of text to bring about change in child welfare practice. This theory has provided conceptual tools to explore the impact of ICT — an emerging challenge for the profession. It has highlighted the need for understanding not just of the features of text, but the conditions of production and distribution of that text. These theoretical positions have led to a methodology and methods that are important in research with service users, particularly as they focus on power relations in the research setting. Foucault’s theories have shown how power may subjugate service users’ voices, and the ongoing need to understand the nature of power in child welfare research. Foucault’s theory of
power/knowledge also assisted in understanding the role of power in this research setting.

10.5.2 The ongoing challenge of research methods

Social constructionist theory has led to useful methodologies and methods for understanding service users’ experiences. These present ongoing challenges.

Some of my methods have been productive in identifying and addressing the impact of power in the research setting. I undertook discourse analysis using a number of texts, rather than just rely on the literature itself, and had my own coding of the study interviews checked by a senior academic to limit my impact on interpretation. I focused on service users with completed and long-term interventions, to limit the influence of dependence on welfare services, or of brief experiences of interventions, on what service users may be prepared to say. To increase opportunities for service users to exercise power, I attempted to engage service users in the design and implementation of the study, by involving representative groups, seeking the views of service users and involving a co-researcher. I also focused on interview techniques that did not limit service users’ opportunities to express themselves because of differences in literary competency, and I paid particular attention to ways of involving children in the study. I exercised care in transcription and attempted to identify my position as an insider, and the impact that might have on the findings.

It must be acknowledged, however, that many of these methods had limited impact on the power relations that subjugated service users’ voices. Issues that were difficult to change included gate-keeping, restricted opportunities for consultation with service users, and adults’ exercise of power over young people. There were many occasions in this study when representatives of organisations influenced the study and excluded certain service users. The process of ethics approval led to the exclusion of children under eight years of age, and young people still using services, as adults made decisions about what was in the best interests of children. Furthermore, agencies and social
workers actively participated in decisions about who would be included in the study, and this meant that the study may have been biased against those service users with more negative experiences of the interventions. Attempts to open opportunities to hear service users’ experiences may also have been limited by the level of reimbursement deemed appropriate by university ethics committees. Individuals with limited literacy may also have been excluded by virtue of research methods based on the extensive use of written text. Future research will need to consider the level of resources needed for consultations, to re-examine reimbursement to participants, and to find ways to better engage Indigenous people and young children.

Even if the issues described above could be addressed, researchers need to be vigilant about the ongoing negotiation of power in research, and its impact on findings. Attempts either to ‘bestow’ or to ‘withdraw’ power through LAC and SCARF tended to be simplistic, and a Foucauldian view of power provides an important warning about power relations in the research setting. In this view, research interviews are best seen as a site for the ongoing negotiation of power between interviewer and participants. Furthermore, external power relations need to be considered in the research setting. This may be especially the case with research that involves children, and more pronounced still in child welfare, where adult protection of children may not be assumed:

Both their status as children and their vulnerability as looked after children mean that, quite rightly, ethical issues have to be carefully addressed in the process of selection [for research interviews] (Ward, Skuse, & Munro, 2005 p. 10).

Incorporating a Foucauldian understanding of power, in which the interview is a productive negotiation affected by external power relations, may increase the capacity of researchers to understand service users’ experiences.

10.5.3 Areas for future research

In the immediate future, research is required to augment the findings of this study, and to monitor changes in discourse and the non-discursive factors that affect child welfare practice. I argue that there are three areas for future research: Firstly, studies of service
users’ experiences need to overcome the difficulties encountered in this study of the subjugation of service users’ ‘voices’. In particular, greater understanding is needed about those service users who stopped using services before social workers thought appropriate. Such service users were not part of this study. Research is also needed with service users who come from a broad range of agencies; this would assist in understanding the impact of particular welfare agencies on people’s experiences of case management. Also needed are studies of the experiences of very young children (under the age of eight in SCARF and ten in LAC) and of young people still in care. While there is research currently being undertaken with Indigenous Australians in relation to LAC, it would be useful to undertake research with individuals who are outside the nuclear family relationships, such as tribal elders.

Secondly, research is needed on the wide range of factors affecting service users’ experiences of case managed interventions. Such factors include the design of welfare programs (such as specialisation affecting the type of assistance offered), social workers’ skills, and the effects of external circumstances (such as improvements in a family’s employment). Research into the ways in which social workers and carers have used the case management systems might also assist in understanding service users’ experiences.

Thirdly, examination is needed of the application of ICT to child welfare. The ‘lived experience’ of interactions between social workers and service users on-line would need to be carefully monitored. It will be important to monitor changes in technology such as the increased integration of mobile phones and computers, which could contribute to lessening expenses and allowing greater use. Ongoing research will be needed into the social factors affecting access to and use of ICT, and into understanding the affordances of the internet and mobile phones, as well as their limitations for social work communication.

Research will need to be ongoing due to the rapid and complex changes in discourses affecting case management.
10.6 CONCLUSION

Case management systems embody ‘new’ ways of combining ‘statements’ from the discourses of social work, management and childhood and the shift to greater democratisation. This combination of discourses is complex, open to interpretation and ongoing change. Many of the discourses embodied in LAC and SCARF have been highly contested since the origins of the social work profession; others reflect more recent changes in wider societal orders of discourse.

Case management systems are also among the first applications of technologisation in child welfare practice; they are typical of a tendency increasingly common in wider society to use text to alter social practice. The authors of LAC and SCARF have aimed to consciously utilise text to bring about change in social work practice: that is, to reform child welfare practice affecting many of the most vulnerable children and young people in Australia.

Emerging from the United Kingdom in the 1980s, aspects of LAC-based case management have had particular resonance in the Australian service system. LAC and SCARF have, however developed in a different place and time, and have changed significantly since their initial implementation, particularly in relation to technology and participatory strategies. The time has come for redevelopment of these systems with specific reference to Australian service users and changes in technology. There are few other attempts at reform and the need for increased effectiveness will be ongoing.

In this study service users have provided a valuable basis for consideration of areas for potential development in LAC and SCARF. This thesis has put forward the case that child welfare practice, including the redevelopment of case management systems, needs to consider the contribution of service users to construction of knowledge about interventions. Service users’ knowledge was not included in the original production of case management systems, and subsequent claims on their behalf are unclear. This thesis has argued for the increased inclusion of service users in the ‘construction’ of social work knowledge, particularly given the divisions among social workers over child welfare practice. It is only through consideration of the ‘lived’ experience of the child
welfare intervention that the aims, processes and power relations can be most fully understood. Service users have contested social workers’ understanding of the aims and planning processes of interventions, and brought important light to bear on power relations and the use of texts in social work. To continue the process of understanding service users’ experiences will require ongoing research, and the ongoing development of research methods suited to the social circumstances of vulnerable children and young people and their parents. It will also require social workers to be reflective of their own ‘subject positions’ in research.

Child welfare practitioners can no longer ignore the impact of technology. The use of written text has a long history in social work, which has been increased through case management, but is frequently overlooked. The challenge of increased use of ICT is of immediate importance, although ultimately only one of many discursive factors involved in a child welfare intervention. To harness ICT to support vulnerable children, social workers need to reflect on the use of ICT with service users, and the complex digital divide affecting vulnerable children and young people. ICT could bring some new possibilities to case managed interventions, and may bring changes to communication in child welfare practice and overcome some significant limitations of the paper-based case management systems. Before this can occur, however, there are significant barriers to be overcome. These include: the co-option of ICT by social workers to increase their own power, poor understanding of the nature of computer-mediated communication, and; the limited access of service users to ICT.

Changes in child welfare practice, including the increased use of ICT, will be inevitable and must be consistently reviewed. Social constructionism, informed by Foucault and subsequent theorists, has provided a basis to consider the complex and changing nature of child welfare practice. Service users will have limited opportunities to exercise power, but if they are not included in the process, they will be increasingly unable to exercise power. The use of ICT, however, cannot be ignored, because its use, like that of other welfare knowledge, cannot be assumed to be power ‘neutral’.


Australian Communications and Media Authority (2008), Access to the internet, broadband and mobile phones in family households. Media and Communications in Australian Families series, No 3 Australian Government. Canberra.


Cashmore J, Paxman M (1996), Wards Leaving Care: A Longitudinal Study. NSW Department of Community Services Sydney.


Cheers D, Kufeldt K, Klein R, Rideout S. (2005), Fostering international research relationships to assist children in care: a case example using the Looking After Children system in Canada and Australia. 2005 IFCO World Conference. Madison, Wisconsin, USA.


Clare M (2003), Good enough parenting when government is ‘the parent’. Children Australia 28:4 pp.19-24.


CREATE (2001), Participation in Case Planning Processes. A Consultation with Children and Young People in Care about their Experiences of Decision Making, Create Foundation, Sydney.


CREATE (2008), Report Care: Transition from Care, Create Foundation, Sydney.


Facer K, Furlong J, Sutherland R (2001), Home is where the Hardware is: Young people, the domestic environment, and 'access' to new technologies. In Children, Technology and Culture, ed. I Hutchby, J Moran-Ellis. London: Routledge Falmer.


Klease C (2008), Silenced stakeholders: Responding to mothers' experiences of the child protection system. Children Australia 33:3 pp.21-8.


LAC Project (2005), Comparison of Victorian LAC Forms to current TLPA LAC Forms, Barnardos Australia and University of New South Wales, Sydney.


McDonald C (1999), Human service professionals in the community services industry. Australian Social Work 52:1 pp.16-25.


Parton, N (2009), Challenges to practice and knowledge in child welfare social work: From the ‘social’ to the ‘informational’. Children and Youth Services Review doi:10:1016/j.childyouth.2009.01.008


Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee (2001), Lost Innocents: Righting the Record, Australian Government, Canberra.


294


Tolley S (2004), Summary of changes made to Children In Need and their Family Assessment and Planning Framework by Barnardos and University of NSW, Barnardos Australia, Sydney.


Tyler TR (2002), Is the Internet changing social life? It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. Journal of Social Issues 58:1 pp.195-205.


Ward H, Skuse T, Munro ER (2005), ‘The best of times, the worst of times’ young people’s views of care and accommodation. Adoption and Fostering 29:1 pp.8-17.


Glossary

**Aboriginal Placement Principle** (APP)—a principle that aims to maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s culture when they live in out of home care. Its detailed provisions are different in each Australian State and Territory.

**Action Record**—a form in SCARF (see Appendix 2).

**Affordances**—‘functional and relational aspects, which frame but not determining the possibilities of agentic action in relation to technology’ (Hutchby, 2001 p.444).

**Animators**—a term used by Fairclough (1992) to refer to the person who makes a sound or mark on paper. The animator may be different from the author of a text who puts the words together initially.

**Asynchronous communication**—this refers to communication over the internet in which there is a gap between interactions. That is the interaction is not conducted in real time.

**Assessment and Action Records (AAR)**—a series of forms in LAC that are used for periodic review of a child or young person’s development (see Appendix 1).

**Blogs**—personal web pages on which owners can post messages. Some blogs are monologues, some have shared authorship and some are interactive.

**Care Plans**—a form in the LAC systems (see Appendix 1).

**Chatrooms**—continuous Internet-based discussions on a particular topic. Some have moderators and others are uncontrolled. They may be undertaken in real time (synchronous) or stored and made available to people when they come on-line (asynchronous).

**Children in need**—a term defined by United Kingdom legislation to refer to children who need services to ensure their adequate rearing.
**Democratisation**—the term used by Fairclough (1992) to refer to removal of inequalities and asymmetries in discursive and linguistic right, obligations and prestige of groups of people.

**Developmentalism**—an approach to understanding child development and childhood based on the view of the becoming adult.

**Discourse technologies**—a term utilised by Fairclough to extend Foucault’s ideas of technologies of power applied to discourses. Examples include interviews, advertising and case management.

**Discursive practices**—the processes of production, distribution and consumption of texts.

**Distribution of text**—patterns of consumption of text and routines for reproducing and transforming text.

**Dominant discourses**—assumptions and understandings that are regarded as more legitimate forms of knowledge.

**Family support services**—welfare services that assist parents to safely rear their children. They include home visiting services, crisis accommodation, child care, counselling.

**Governmentality**—an explanation of contemporary forms of regulating conduct through particular techniques and self-disciplining processes.

**Industry partner**—Barnardos Australia. Barnardos Australia is a company incorporated in Australia. It is an independent legal entity to Barnardos United Kingdom though it is accountable for the standards of work for the use of the name and links are maintained to other international Barnardos organisations in New Zealand and Ireland.
**Instant Messaging (IM)**—an internet application that allows real time (synchronous) conversations with an on-screen list of known contacts. Common systems are MSN and Yahoo!Messenger.

**LAC Projet**—a coalition of Barnardos Australia and the University of New South Wales to develop LAC, SCARF and Integrated Children’s System in eastern Australia.

**New Children’s Paradigm**—recent change in concepts of childhood that rejects developmentalism.

**Orders of discourse**—the totality of discourses within an institution or society and the relationships between them.

**Out of Home Care**—a term used to describe welfare accommodation and services for children and young people who don’t live with their families for reasons of abuse, neglect or parental inability to rear them. It includes foster care, residential care and kinship care.

**Review of Arrangements**—a form in the LAC system (see Appendix 1).

**Service users**—children, young people and their parents utilising child welfare services.

**Social networking sites**—on-line social network applications of the internet that enable users to create personal profiles and vary in the level of privacy afforded. The most popular include MySpace (which allows classified advertisements and uploading of music), Bebo, Facebook and Friendster.

**Social workers**—used in this thesis to refer to workers undertaking direct work with service users in child welfare. In this thesis the term is used in a broader sense than a person eligible to be a member of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

**Statements**—legitimised assertions that are authoritative claims to truth.

**Subjectification**—the way in which discourses create the individual in particular ways.
**Subject positions**—relationship between the individual and discourses and statements that affect the individual’s perceptions, intentions and acts. This person’s positioning may change in particular contexts.

**Subjugated knowledge**—lost knowledge due to the operation of power and the strengths of dominant discourses.

**Supporting Children and Responding to Families (SCARF)**—the case management system developed by The LAC Project to assist children receiving services while living in their own home.

**Synchronous**—refers to real time interchanges in internet communication.

**Technologisation**—a term used by Norman Fairclough to refer to the conscious use of texts to regulate social practices. Technologisation refers to a wide variety of strategies in diverse contexts used increasingly in specific institutional locations by designated social agents.

**Text**—anything that can be read for meaning. Fairclough (1992) uses the concept to refer to both spoken and written texts.

**United Kingdom (UK)**—the countries of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
Appendices

Appendix 1  LAC flow chart  305
Appendix 2  SCARF flow chart  306
Appendix 3  SCARF assessment domains  307
Appendix 4  Publications and presentations related to this thesis  308
Appendix 5  Interview questions  309
Appendix 6  Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children  310
APPENDIX 2 – SCARF FLOW CHART

SCARF Flow Chart

Referral Record

Assessment Agreement

Child & Family Assessment including Add-Its (and Individual Child Summaries)

Planning Agreement

Action Plan/s

Review Record/s

New Information Record Child Protection Report

Record of contact

New Assessment

New Priorities

New Plan

Urgent Review

November, 2008
Appendix 4
Publications and presentations related to this thesis

Journals and Book Chapters


Tregeagle S 2009 The potential to increase participation in child welfare services through ICT. International Journal of ICT and Human Development (invited paper under review).


Tregeagle S. 2007a. The complex digital divide: Information and communication technology use amongst Australian child welfare service users. Children Australia 32 pp.9–16


Conference Presentations

Tregeagle S. 2008a. The digital divide in family support services. ACWA08 Conference, Sydney


Tregeagle S. 2008c. Service Users’ Experiences of Case Managed Interventions in Foster Care. Australian National Foster Care Conference. Brighton Le Sands

Tregeagle S, Hoyles B. 2007. Harnessing information and communication technology in work with young people. Are we there yet? Conference Melbourne

Tregeagle S. 2007b. Young people, ICT and participation in welfare decision-making. Young people, new technologies and political engagement Conference. University of Surrey. United Kingdom


Appendix 5
Interview questions

What comes to mind when you hear the word LAC/SCARF?

When you were meeting with your worker did you talk about the things that were most important to you at the time? What was useful to you or your family?

Were you able to share in making decisions?

Did LAC/SCARF help in making plans?

Did the agencies involved with you/your family get on well?

Did the worker do everything they said they would?

Insurance questions:

- If you were redesigning the form how would you change it?
- What would you tell another child/young person/family about LAC/SCARF?
- If you were to tell the boss of the agency what they could do better, what would you say?

Do you use mobile phones and computers as much as you would like?

Did you get to speak to your worker often enough?

Do you use mobile phones and the internet to communicate with your worker? Would you like to?

Insurance question:

- How would you like to communicate if money were no object?
APPENDIX 6—Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

brilliant thoughts about welfare services using LAC and SCARF and how kids use computers and phones.

How you are feeling about talking to Sue?

Draw or cartoon your own
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

A map of me and the people who matter

Think of everyone you know and write, stick pictures or draw them in around you.

Draw cartoon or write yourself in the middle.

Use red for people you feel close to, green for people you want to feel closer to and blue for people you don't get on with.

Draw lines to them. Use different colours to represent how you get on or how close you are.

How I use phones and computers

Instant messaging (MSM)

Email

Mobile text

Games

Blogging

Other

Put a big X against the things you'd like to be able to use
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

Put a circle around anything you recognise

How did you feel about the services your family received when using SCARF or LAC?

Choose from the words or pictures

- Cross
- Sad
- Happy
- Bored
- Good
- Happy
- Annoyed
- Nothing
- Scared
- Nervous
- OK
- Relaxed
- Excited
- Comfortable
- Calm
- Funny
- Quiet
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking about the help you or your family got.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Smiley face]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I liked... | I didn’t like...

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you get to have your say?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you get to see the information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did people do what they said?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you get to keep a copy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*This layout courtesy © Queen’s Printer and Controller of HMSO (2016)*
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

Can you fill in the Snakes and Ladders board?

Write things that make life harder along the SNAKES. Write things that help you out along the LADDERS.

If I had three wishes about the way I or my family was helped...

draw or write
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What questions do you wish you were asked?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did people ask you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do you hope to be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will you need to get these things?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Say 'if you own way' © Queen's Printers and Controller of HMSO (2000)*
APPENDIX 15 – Example of booklet used in interviews with younger children

What would you tell other people your age about LAC or SCARF?

Would you like a copy of this booklet?

Thank you for helping in this research. It was a big help to Sue, the University of Western Sydney and Barnardos. We hope to be able to help families and young people better.