

## Professor Kevin Ronan 1960–2020

In March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic and the lives of children around the world were turned upside down. Those of us who work in the field of children and disasters knew that the impacts on their physical safety, mental health, education and psychosocial development would be profound. We knew that child-centred research and advocacy would be essential to ensuring that their rights to protection and participation were upheld. So, it was with an overwhelming sense of loss that in March 2020, we also said goodbye to one of the true pioneers of disaster research with children, Professor Kevin Ronan.

Kevin was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1960. A talented student, he graduated valedictorian of Harding High School in Saint Paul, Minnesota in 1979. In 1984, he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of Minnesota and was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa honour society. He then attended Temple University in Philadelphia, where he earned both a master's degree and a PhD in Clinical Psychology, picking up numerous awards for academic excellence along the way. He commenced his professional career as a clinical psychologist in 1991 with a two-year stint at the Napa State Hospital, where he worked in assessment, treatment, research, consultation, inpatient and forensic services. He then moved to North Carolina, where he took up a position in adolescent treatment services at Brunswick Hospital. Just two years later, in 1993, he was appointed Facility Director at the Butner Adolescent Treatment Centre.

In 1995, Kevin was drawn back into academia with the offer of a tenured lectureship in the Department of Psychology at Massey University, Aoteroa New Zealand. Unable to resist the lure of the land of long white cloud, he packed up his life in the US and moved with his wife, Isabel, and their first daughter, Emily, to Te Papa-i-Oea Palmerston North. Their second daughter Kaitlin was born soon after they arrived. By 1997, Kevin had been promoted to Senior Lecturer, and in 1999, he was appointed Director of Clinical Psychology Training and the Head of Massey's three campus training programme. Kevin had only just commenced his new role at Massey when, in September 1995, Mount Ruapehu erupted in spectacular fashion for the first time in 50 years. And so began his pioneering research on children, natural hazards and disasters.

In collaboration with his young PhD student, David Johnson (now Professor of Disaster Management and Director of the Joint Centre for Disaster Research at Massey University), Kevin designed and implemented a school-based early intervention programme at three Ruapehu district primary schools and began publishing landmark papers on the impact of volcanic eruptions on childhood emotional functioning. Over the next several years, Kevin and David published extensively on the topic of children, schools and natural hazards. They progressed their work beyond the realm of children's emotional responses to hazard events by undertaking world first research on children's hazard perceptions and their knowledge of protective behaviours. In 2001, they published the first ever empirical studies on the benefits of hazards education for children and youth in *Risk Analysis* and the *Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies*. Then in 2005, they published their seminal book *Promoting community resilience in disasters: The role for schools, youth, and families*, thereby cementing school-based hazards education for children and young people as a legitimate and necessary field of enquiry within the broader hazards and disasters research agenda.

In 2006, Kevin relocated to Australia, where he was appointed Head of the Department of Behavioural and Social Sciences at Central Queensland University (CQU) in Rockhampton. In 2010, he developed the CQU clinical psychology master's program, thereby building capacity





for the provision of quality mental health care services in rural and regional Queensland. That same year, he was appointed Chair of the Australian Psychological Society's Disaster Preparedness and Response Reference Group, a position he held for almost a decade. In 2013, he convened an expert panel to develop of the society's "Ethical guidelines on providing psychological services in response to disasters", which articulates the national benchmark standards for Australian psychologists working in a post-disaster context.

From 2014 to 2018, Kevin served as a Chief Investigator on the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre's project on Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDDR). Under Kevin's leadership, this project not only developed an evidence-base for CCDDR in the Australian context but made a significant contribution to policy and practice at the international level. During his time on the project, Kevin was commissioned to write the background paper on school curricula, education material and training for the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 Global Assessment Report. This document fed into the development of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which explicitly recognises children as agents of change in disaster risk reduction.

From 2016 to 2019, Kevin was shepherd to a cogent series of research studies and briefs published by the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector and Save the Children. This work spoke to Kevin's deep commitment to strengthening both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence, and it culminated in the development of roadmap for child-centred risk reduction and school safety that points a way forward to achieving collective impact for children.

Over the course of his career, Kevin supervised dozens of masters and doctoral students, many of whom have gone to make their own outstanding contributions to child and adolescent mental health, disaster risk reduction and community resilience. He also established and nurtured international networks of researchers, policy makers and practitioners who will be drawing on his legacy for decades to come. But for all of his achievements, nothing could compare to the pride Kevin felt for his family. He was a deeply devoted husband and father, and his "girls" – Isabel, Emily and Kaitlin – truly were the centre of his universe.

Vale Professor Kevin Ronan. A true mid-western mensch, he will be dearly missed by everyone who had privilege of knowing him.

**Briony Towers and Marla Petal**