



THE WEST AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORKER

I'm sure you, as I, have heard it said on many occasions recently, that we do live in strange times. One of the strangest things that's happened to me in the last couple of weeks was receiving a copy of the speech notes from the Minister for Family and Children's Services, the Hon Roger Nicholls to the Children's Summit held on Saturday, 28 October, the theme of which was proposals for the creation of a Children's Commission and Children's Commissioner.

In his speech Mr Nicholls reiterates the importance of the family to society and to the care, nurture and upbringing of children. Much of his speech contained things about which all of us who have worked in the field of human services already know. His speech suggests that public policy ought to be predicated entirely on what he would call functional families.

To quote him, he suggests that "no bureaucratic or legal structure could possibly 'represent' children in their relationships with their parents in functional families those relationships are too personal, too fundamental for such intrusions." He goes on to say "likewise, no bureaucratic or legal structure can assume the role of functional parents in 'representing' their children in the community."

While most of this one would agree with, it begs the question of the role of government, government agencies or indeed government bureaucracies, have in ensuring that those people who do not fit in to what could be perceived as "normal" can avail themselves of a reasonable existence into our society. If everything and everyone was functional there would be no need for police, welfare agencies, counsellors and therapists. The reality is that is not the case. Unfortunately a lot of what we hear preached to us and a lot of what underpins public policy is unbelievably simplistic in the extreme.

In forwarding to me a copy of his speech, his covering letter states, "A Children's Commission or Commissioner is more likely to develop as something that comes between parents and children and is therefore unlikely to be helpful. In these days of ill-defined 'rights' which ignore the true nature of relationships, the danger of damaging intervention is even greater." The fundamental question seems to escape the Minister. A Children's Commission is not to intercede between parents and children but to ensure that children are accorded, not what Mr Nicholls might see as 'ill-defined rights' but their rights to live within a modern democratic state.

Many of today's political figures demean the importance of rights. We read and hear rights being interpreted as things that can be earned. Rights are fundamental to a civil society and of great importance in ensuring fairness, equity and access. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was agreed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948.

These rights are basic to our existence in a modern civil society. Government should predicate all it does upon these rights. The duplicity however, that we see, is such that many governments through action and rhetoric attempt to undermine these fundamental human rights without the courage to publicly and internationally repudiate them. It might be of interest to ponder upon one of the basic universal human rights in the United Nations Declaration, and that is Part 2 of Article 23, "Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work." Significantly this was ratified at the Federal level recently at the intercession of Bob Hawke, so that one could assume it is still an agreed basic right and one that is important to our industrial existence.

Significantly however, workplace agreements and enterprise bargaining agreements, appear to be in total dissonance to such a right. We're seeing within Western Australia a move towards creating an industrial situation where chaos ensues in relation to the measurement of work and the remuneration accorded to that work. Not only are governments seemingly opposed to this particular right but trade unions have forgotten that it is also fundamental to their function within a civil society.

"The duplicity however, that we see, is such that many governments through action and rhetoric attempt to undermine these fundamental human rights without the courage to publicly and internationally repudiate them".

President's Report

How long has it been since Article 26 has been important to us? "Everyone has the right to education. Education should be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." There isn't a young person attending any elementary school whose parents are not asked to pay additional to their taxation to ensure schools continue, a fee, that is levied so the school can buy basic equipment for the education of that child.

It seems to me, that our profession needs to stridently put forward its position in relation to the kind of world we want both to live and work in.

Many of us could be forgiven for thinking that we have descended into a chasm that may well have been experienced during the middle and late 1930s in another part of the world. I often get the feeling that I'm just emerging from a Munich Beer Hall, but here in WA it would probably be into the arms of those who run the 'booze bus'.

While this little President's Report has given me the opportunity to raise an issue that is important to me, I would like to end on this note. I recently re-read a book entitled the "Rise of the Meritocracy 1870 - 2033", written by Michael Young whose mother was Irish and father was Australian. It was first published in 1958 and is a satirical essay looking backwards from a sociological point of view to the period 1870 to 2033.

The basic tenet of his essay is the subsequent outcome of a society building its structures around merit which he defines as equalling intelligent quotient plus effort ($IQ + E = M$). In this humorous retrospective essay there is one quote that jumped out at me. "The Labor party made the inevitable compromise with the new society it had done so much to create: it ceased to exist." As social workers we may well suffer for not dissimilar reasons face a similar fate.

BRIAN WOOLLER

As you will see in this newsletter, Imelda Dodds is about to leave us for (not necessarily greener pastures) in the Eastern States. Imelda has made a singular contribution to social work in Western Australia.

She is the second West Australian elected to the position of President of the National body and has continued in the proud tradition that we expect of those from the West. Unlike Grace Vaughan the other person in who's footsteps she followed, Imelda is (and I'm proud to say this) a home bred product.

All of us who have worked with, and known Imelda will miss her, but despite this, wish her all the best in her new adventure in Sydney.

BRIAN WOOLLER

A TRIBUTE TO IMELDA

Over the last few days the news has spread like warm honey on toast: "Have you heard that Imelda is leaving Perth and going to Sydney?" No one asks "Imelda who?" Of course, she has been doing a lot of this crossing the Nullabor lately, but until now she has come back. There is finality, sadness and shock in the voices of most who have shared the news - Imelda is as much Perth as the Sky Show. Is anything safe from change?

I write this brief salute to note the imminent departure of our friend and colleague as someone who is familiar with moving on. What right have I to feel such a loss as a respected friend moves on to be with her new partner in a new and exciting employment venture? We all have that right to acknowledge our sadness.

We will all miss Imelda because she has been so significant for many of us both personally and professionally. I first 'met' her when I arrived in Perth somewhere around 1988 and she was travelling Europe. I joined the local branch of the AASW on my arrival and so many people told me about Imelda and her commitment to her profession and to what would now be called 'best practice' that I felt I knew her long before she returned from her long holiday.

Since then, she has become as close a friend and respected colleague to me as she has to many of you. And she has done this at the same time as she has lead the state branch of the AASW, developed and maintained a strong network of family and friendship relationships, taken on the important role of Public Guardian and then - on top of all of this - gone on to become national President of AASW. Although she has achieved all of this due to her own extraordinary energy, I swear it is the mobile phone in the car which helps. How many of us have not had an early morning call or late afternoon call from the 'Guardian on wheels'?

Yes, we will all miss Imelda at the same time as we wish her well in her new life in Sydney where she takes on the role of Chief Executive Officer of the Autistic Association of NSW. There is no doubt she will soon make her mark in Sydney. And, of course, for a while longer Imelda will remain very present in our professional lives as she continues her work as National President of AASW. She will also be 'coming home' a lot because family and friends are here and we all know that it is a hard place to leave! Imelda, congratulations and good luck from all of us.

MARIA HARRIES

AASW (WA BRANCH) 1996 STATE CONFERENCE

Calling for Volunteers

This special 50th Anniversary event is scheduled for September 1996. There are many ways in which you may have input to this important event. Here are some options - the choice is yours!!

- * *Conference tasks ie helping with mail out, preparing satchels etc*
- * *Conference Committee member*
- * *Contact person for your agency*
- * *50th Anniversary Historical Displays*
 - ✓ *collection of information*
 - ✓ *presentation*
 - ✓ *coordination between agencies and /or areas of social work*
- * *Ideas*
 - ✓ *theme*
 - ✓ *sponsorship*
 - ✓ *speakers*
 - ✓ *social activities*
- * *Advance Notice - Call for Papers*

Would you, or someone you know like to present a paper or contribute to a 'Skills Day Workshop'. The formal Call for Papers will be available early in February.

Please call Nova Fariss, Conference Convenor on 458.5333 (W) or 337.4657 (H) or Marian Maughan, Conference Project Officer on 330.2585 or by Fax on 317.3891, with your suggestions.

DIRECTOR LEAVES NEW DIRECTOR NEEDED

After almost six years as Director of the Australian Council on Smoking and Health, Noni Walker is leaving the Australian Council on Smoking and Health.

So, the Council is seeking an energetic person with a commitment to health advocacy to be the new Director.

As AASW members may be aware, the Council is a coalition of 31 medical, health and community organisations committed to reducing the health consequences of smoking through a combination of initiatives relating to education, legislation and cessation.

The Director works under the guidance of a Board to initiate and implement strategies for smoking control; coordinate funding for the Council; supervise a small team of staff and volunteers; represent the Council as a spokesperson in the media; and work closely with Council member organisations and other groups.

If you have tertiary qualifications in a relevant discipline, good communication skills (written and spoken), research skills, good interpersonal skills, administrative experience, and a commitment to health advocacy - you may be interested in the job.

Telephone (09) 388.3342 or (09) 381.4515 for application details. The salary package is \$45,000 - \$50,000 pa (including car, mobile phone).

**Closing date for applications 12 January
1996 to PO Box 327, Subiaco WA 6008**

Meet Nova Fariss, convenor 1996 State Conference

We are pleased to announce that Nova Fariss has agreed to be the Convenor for the 1996 Branch Conference. 1996 is the 50th Anniversary of both the AASW Ltd and the WA Branch. Nova completed her Bachelor of Social Work at W.A.I.T. in 1973 and after starting her social work career as a community development worker for the then Department for Community Welfare at Fremantle, she moved to Papua New Guinea in 1975, and Darwin in 1978. One of her most significant work experiences in the Northern Territory was with the Department for Community Development, in a range of supervisory, program management and divisional management roles.

On returning to Perth in 1986, Nova worked part-time for a few years, particularly in the area of out-of-home care at Perth District for Family and Children's Services. She also followed up her interest in human services management by obtaining a Graduate Diploma in Business from Curtin University in 1991, and in the same year took up the appointment as Director of Mofflyn.

In her role as Director of Mofflyn, Nova has had experience of presenting at several state and national conferences for the AASW and areas related to Mofflyn's work, and in organising the first WA Family Preservation Conference. She represents Mofflyn's interests on bodies such as the Developmental Disability Council and the Children's Youth and Family Agencies Association, of which she is Chairperson, and is involved in a national organisation for child and family welfare agencies.



Letters

Dear Brian

I write this letter to you and the WA Branch to express my gratitude to you all for the support which you have provided me as both Branch and National President and to wish you well in the coming years.

As you know from my phone conversation and previous letter, I will be moving to New South Wales in the New Year. The move is for personal reasons which are overwhelmingly positive. I am also pleased to be assuming the role of Chief Executive Officer of the Autistic Association of New South Wales.

In leaving Western Australia, where I have lived all of my life to date, there are also many sadnesses and saying goodbye to trusted friends and respected colleagues is one.

I have had the privilege to work with so many loyally committed and skilled social workers over the 18+ years of my practice here. I have also been given the rare privilege of establishing an organisation such as the Public Guardian's Office.

My experience of the WA Branch has been very positive and I will take with me the strong memories of a functioning, committed and inclusive group of people who constantly provide a very good service to members.

I shall miss the Quarterly Meetings and other opportunities to catch up with the WA network. I hope that when I am back visiting family and friends that I may be able to coincide with some Branch functions.

Finally, I want to say a very special thanks to Liz, Mary, Pattie and Barbie and the many members of the Committee of Management. Importantly, my very special thanks to you for always being there and always being prepared to pick up the challenges - internal and external. Social work in WA and nationally is indebted to you.

With warmest of wishes

Imelda Dodds

8 December 1995

New Members

Mark Barrett-Lennard (Family and Children's Services)
Felicity Brackley (Family and Children's Services)
Ingrid Bruce (Student - Curtin University)
Kris Csillag (Ministry of Justice - Bunbury)
Pauline Dixon (Wanslea Family Services)
Sandra Ghani (Student - University of Western Australia)
Shareen Ghani (Student - University of Western Australia)
Vanessa Gorddard (Student - University of Western Australia)
Lynette Isaacs (Student - University of Western Australia)
Lorraine Johnston (Women's Health Care House)
James McRobert (Bunbury Regional Hospital)
Joy Robustellini (Student - Curtin University)
Elaine Smart (Parents Without Partners)
Lisa Telford (Student - University of Western Australia)
Jenny Wignall (Hollywood Private Hospital)
Brian Witcombe (Student - Curtin University)
Agnes Zdrodowski (Student - Curtin University)

Grace Vaughan Memorial Lecture Attention all members

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MENTAL HEALTH 9AM TUESDAY JANUARY 23

Professor Beverley Raphael is presenting the Grace Vaughan Memorial Lecture for 1996. All AASW members are encouraged to attend. The lecture is free.

Mental health may be strongly influenced by social inequity both on the basis of gender and race, but also in socially deprived communities and individuals. Professor Raphael will consider the public health implications of mental disorder and the effectiveness of prevention initiatives which encompass social justice issues as well as the need to incorporate this into systems of mental health care. She will also address society's stigmas towards mental illness and its implications.

Beverley Raphael is currently head of the University of Queensland, Department of Psychiatry and Director of Mental Health Services, Brisbane North Region, Queensland Health Department.

She is a member of the National Health and Medical Research Council, National Health Advisory Committee; the Health Advancement Standing Committee and the Quality of Care and Health Outcomes Standing Committee.

Professor Raphael's areas of specific expertise include, grief and bereavement, disaster and trauma management, Aboriginal mental health, adolescent and child psychiatry and mental health prevention and promotion. Professor Raphael and Pat Swan recently completed for the Commonwealth Government, a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental health Policy document entitled 'Ways Forward'. Inquiries: Tel: 380 2433, Fax:

Issues in Mental Health in WA 9am Thursday January 25

The UWA Summer School concludes with a panel discussion on issues in Mental Health in Western Australia. The panellists are all people who have had long-term involvement and interest in the mental health area. Inquiries: Tel: 380 2433, Fax: 380 1066.

The Overview edition of *The West Australian Social Worker* is published bi-monthly by the WA branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd (ACN 008 576 010). Services, products, opinions and enclosures published in *The West Australian Social Worker* are not considered as necessarily endorsed by nor represent the policy of the AASW. Contributions are accepted on the understanding they may be subject to editorial revision.