

President's Report

I have once again just returned from the Directors' meeting in Canberra which was held on weekend of 14 and 15 June. The meeting as usual went over two and a half days and commenced on the Friday preceding the weekend.

As usual this meeting was taken up with considerable concern over the national budget. At the end of the day, a number of program areas did not get the budget that they had wanted to complete their activities. This was in large measure due to the possibility of a major shortfall between income and expenditure if their initial bids were to be met. At the end, the agreed budget contained a surplus of \$6,000.

During the meeting priorities were discussed and clearly the two most important areas that the Directors decided needed to be the focus for the coming financial year were ethics and continuing professional education. While recognising the need to maintain momentum with Boards of Practice, it was not accorded as high a priority for the coming financial year.

Investigations are still continuing about the possibility of purchase of property for the national office in the long term, and this will be further reported on at the Directors' meeting in November.

The Chief Executive Officer has been in his position now for 12 months and there have been substantial organisational improvements as a result. All staff of the Association, including those employed in branch offices (apart from casual employees) will be linked to an employment agreement.

Currently all assessment of overseas qualifications are the primary responsibility of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR). This activity is to be devolved and the Association has agreed to accept this under certain specific conditions. This is a little like running full circle as the previous arrangement with the Commonwealth Government was for the Association to undertake this on their behalf and be paid for out of Commonwealth funding.

The new arrangement, as I understand it, will be that the Commonwealth will provide a seeding grant in the early stages, but that the assessment of overseas qualifications will have to be in the longer term self funding. This will of course mean a

substantial cost to those people applying for the assessment of their qualifications for eligibility purposes.

The national conference which this year is being held in Canberra is progressing well and looks like being a particularly outstanding conference.

The eligibility for membership of AASW document is progressing well and with some luck may be ready for use in 1998.

While the Boards of Practice was not allocated the most important priority for the coming year, it is progressing well and Joe Calleja briefed the Directors on progress to date. A discussion paper will be circulated for comment.

The Board was also briefed by the Acting Convenor of the National Ethics Committee. They will be, as a matter of urgent priority, revising the By-laws and commencing the process on revision of the Code itself. They will also be putting together and documenting previous cases and decisions taken, to add to the body of case knowledge on ethical matters.

It is significant that some branches, including the WA Branch, have over the last year begun to receive a number of complaints about ethical practice.

Some considerable discussion ensued about Health Casemix, particularly in relation to the amount of money budgeted by the Association for this activity. It was felt however, by the Board of Directors, that there have been a number of positive outcomes for the Association to continue making a commitment to the Health Casemix Network.

This will undoubtedly be reviewed as time moves on, as there is some concern that other areas of practice may make this claim on the Association. Significantly, Health Casemix assists all those social workers working in the health arena, and indeed is critical to the contemporary practice of social work in the health setting.

Unfortunately, there are other settings where a similar requirement to categorise and define practice may become necessary. Quite clearly the Association would never be in a position to provide the kinds of resources across the wide fields as it has done with Health Casemix.

It is probably time to begin to look at other ways of resourcing this important activity for the profession, as it has become a recurring long term expenditure for the Association, while recognising that for practice it has a very positive return for those in the health field.

Significantly, this Directors meeting was the last one for our National President, Imelda Dodds as she will be retiring from that position. Imelda's presidency has been characterised by her singular ability in managing process.

Imelda, who stepped in at a difficult time, has demonstrated her ability to develop cohesiveness and purpose in a diverse and rather large group of Directors. She will be missed, and I for one, wish her well in the future.

BRIAN WOOLLER

We need a sense of community by Carey Quan Gelernter

Psychologist Mary Pipher is that rarity in these days of culture wars: She can talk about values without self-righteousness. She reclaims some common sense in the dialogue about family.

First off, she says, scrap the *ad nauseam* emphasis on dysfunctional families. Theories work best for their time and place, she says. (Freud knew middle-class Vienna in late 1800s, but what applies to gangs and downsizing?) Dysfunctional-family theory, she says, works best for whom it was invented: families of longtime alcoholics. Not that there aren't messed-up families, but when the world wasn't so dangerous and pressured, the standards were a lot lower to be a "good enough parent."

Our modern unhappiness involves a crisis of meaning and values, says Pipher. People need a larger purpose in their lives than getting ahead, money and me-ism. We need to rebuild both families and the sense of community.

Whether you're Dan Quayle beating the drums for family values, or Hillary Rodham Clinton preaching the politics of meaning, who can disagree?

When she speaks around the country, Pipher says, liberals thank her for speaking from the liberal point of view, and conservatives thank her for being such a good conservative spokeswoman.

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To both she simply replies: "Thank you."

We need to stop politicizing the discussion of values, because it leads to half-truths, she says. "Everybody's sick of being manipulated. The people who are going to have a voice in this country are not going to be the dividing people, but the connecting people. People are so hungry for a sense of common purpose."

Pipher's book, *The Shelter of Each Other, Rebuilding Our Families*, includes a long list of things - most of them relatively small things - families can do to begin rebuilding both their families and community. While parents of small children may have to wait to participate more in civic life, even the busiest can do a little. "These acts give people a sense of community and control," says Pipher.

It's not possible to just take care of your family. When you think about the needs of your children, you have to think of all the children, and the adults, and the needs of the community.

"For each family to try to take care of itself is like going first-class on the Titanic.

"We are connected. If we don't have decent neighborhoods, our children won't grow up to be mentally healthy people."

Start small in rebuilding

Start with your block. Learn the names of families, or do what one of Pipher's neighbors did for her when she moved

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Urgent Call To All Concerned and Interested Social Workers

The last few weeks have brought into focus yet again the problems facing young people today. These of course are the problems of drug usage, and the now all too common death by overdose and youth suicide.

Two particular recent deaths of young people by drug overdose, have highlighted our profession and our profession's role in working with young people. This job has over the last few years, become increasingly difficult due in no small measure to the position children and young people now occupy within our society. They have become clearly scapegoats and are often blamed for the social ills that currently befall us.

Unfortunately young people are victims. They have never been influential, nor can they be blamed for the parlous state that they are forced to confront with high unemployment, drug usage at epidemic proportions and the rising suicide rate.

We have a responsibility to attempt to do something to emiliorate these problems and not add to them.

I would like to call on members to support your Branch in putting together a taskforce to look at the issues facing children and young people today and attempt to use that information in the public arena with politicians, senior bureaucrats, business and the community at large.

We need to put compassion, caring and people back on the agenda. We have forgotten the importance of a supportive and healthy social system as the principle underpinning preventative work.

I would be interested in any member who wishes to contribute to this taskforce to make contact with me on 9345 7222, Liz Retamal 9443 2934 or any member of the Committee of Management.

LOCUM SOCIAL WORKERS

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Location: Country, Western Australia

Qualifications and experience: An approved social work degree or equivalent and eligibility for membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Duties: To apply professional social work skills and knowledge to support individuals, families, groups and communities.

General: Applications for fixed term employment will remain on a register for 12 months. For further information and a copy of the job description form which includes the selection criteria, please contact Mr Brian Collopy (08) 9791 0555.

Applications: Applicants should nominate their preferred country locations and must address the selection criteria to be considered from the field of applicants. Please send resume and application marked *Private and Confidential* by post to:

Mr Brian Collopy
Family and Children's Services
South Country Regional Office
9th Floor, Bunbury Tower, 61 Victoria Street
Bunbury, WA, 6230.

New Members

Brian Berkley (Student Associate)
Peter Clissa (Student Associate)
Glenda Douglas (Student Associate)
Gayle James (Student Associate)
Jean-pierre Manage (Family and Children's Services)
Lisa Roberts (Student Associate)
Christine Shilton (De Paul Day Centre)
Amy Vieira (Goldfields Group Training)
Paula Wright (Dept of Social Security)

The 4Rs - Managing Youth Suicidal Behaviour

by Stephen Edwards and Jon Pfaff

The 4Rs - Managing Youth Suicidal Behaviour by S. Edwards and J. Pfaff is a booklet funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. It gives an excellent overview of the assessment and management of suicidal individuals. Whilst particularly aimed at young people and for use by General Medical Practitioners, it would be equally valuable to any health professional dealing with suicidal individuals across all age ranges, especially those who may be working in a relatively isolated environment.

The 4Rs stands for:

1. Recognising the signs
2. Raising the issue
3. Risk assessment
4. Responding.

The headings are also incorporated into a chart and provide a well-structured framework for assessment and intervention. The format is well laid out with good use of shading and bullet points to emphasise key issues. A summary card is included which can be used as a prompt for practitioners.

The appendices include a proforma for a no-harm contract and suggestions for developing a resource network and directory. Issues relating to intervention post-attempt, work with families, cross-cultural factors, and confidentiality are addressed together with a proposed best practice model.

Overall, a very worthwhile resource to include in one's library. Copies are available at no charge from the:

National Youth Suicide Prevention Project
PO Box 809, Subiaco 6008
Tel: 9389 9121

**SUBMITTED BY RICHARD MAJDA
COORDINATOR SELF HARM INTERVENTION PROJECT
SCGH**

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in: Have maps of the neighborhood listing the parents, what they do, names and ages of children, phone numbers, who's home during the day, and lists of items neighbors are willing to lend, such as ladders, microphones, snow blowers, Halloween costumes.

- Turn off your TV and computer, walk outside, talk to who's there.
- Help kids find lumber to build a fort or help an elderly neighbor into her apartment with her groceries.
- Parents of teens can meet once a month and talk about how the children are doing.
- Put lawn chairs in front yards instead of fenced-in back patios.
- Organize block parties, parades.
- Carry zucchini bread or garden flowers to each other's houses.
- Offer to watch each other's children, and when they're over, play games with them or teach them something.
- Offer to help neighbors with home-improvement projects, write them notes of news, sympathy or congratulations.
- Children can set up lemonade stands, and the adults can stop for drinks.
- Ask the waiter at the place you buy your morning coffee about his family.
- Go to a school board meeting, coach a ball team.

(Previously published in The Seattle Times, 3 May 1996)