

THE FAMILY UNPLUGGED

*This article, which was written by Richard Simon, was originally published in **Family Therapy Networker**, January/February 1997. It is reproduced here in an edited form, with permission.*

Mary Pipher has lived and practiced therapy in Lincoln, Nebraska for 25 years, rooted in a community where, as much as anywhere in the country, family, friends and a sense of being part of nature still seem to provide the foundation of people's lives. For most of those years, Lincoln marked the borders of Pipher's world. "I'd never been to Washington, New York or Boston", says Pipher. "I'd never known people in the media or in book publishing". But that was 500 interviews ago, before what Pipher and her husband, Jim, also a clinical psychologist, call "the avalanche of roses".

It started in 1994, when, after being rejected by 13 publishers, Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* finally appeared. Written with an anthropologist's eye and ear, it was filled with the stories of Pipher's teenage clients and their struggles to move toward adulthood in the cruel, hypersexualised adolescent culture of the 1990s. Even in Lincoln, it turned out, teenage girls wrestle with the same problems as they do elsewhere in the country - eating disorders, depression, shame about their bodies, substance abuse and unwanted pregnancy. But Pipher was after something more than the individual stories of troubled girls. She was trying to crystallise a problem that as yet had no name - the inner desolation of being initiated into the "girl-poisoning" junk culture of the 90s in which, as Pipher wrote, "parents are not the primary influence in the lives of adolescent girls".

Appearing without advance publicity, *Reviving Ophelia* flew below the media's radar, slowly accumulating a word-of-mouth readership that included therapists, teachers, teens and their parents, giving voice to a cultural undercurrent no one had evoked quite so powerfully before. By November 1995, *Reviving Ophelia* was the number one non-fiction paperback on *The New York Times* best-seller list and stayed there for eight months. It has now spent more than 90 weeks on the Times list and sold over 700,000 copies.

From the relative serenity of Lincoln, Pipher offers a calm, sensible voice from the heartland, totally lacking in self-righteousness and anger she sounds hopeful even in the face of her

disturbing vision of the dire state of family and community life in this country. "For the first time in history, children are not being socialised by their parents", says Pipher. "Our children are being raised by TVs and other appliances. Multinational corporations have become the culture's storytellers, teaching children what life is all about". With the once taken-for-granted support of extended family and community now evaporated, she warns, "you cannot survive as a family if you just let the culture happen to you".

In *Reviving Ophelia* and her more recent, *Shelter of Each Other*, the 49 year old Pipher, who proudly describes herself as "pre TV", asks families to step back from their frenzied schedules and snap out of the media induced trance of the consumer culture. "We have families isolated in their homes, each family member in a different room with their appliance of choice; a television, a computer, a stereo", says Pipher. "No one's talking". Recognising the impossibility of grand solutions, she urges families to start taking simple steps - go outdoors, talk to their neighbours and, most important, turn off their machines.

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In the interview that follows, Pipher describes why she thinks traditional therapy too often fails today's besieged families, while offering her view of how clinical practice can change to confront the realities of a fragmented culture.

FTN: In your books, you seem to be saying that instead of becoming too focused on what's going wrong in our families, we first need to understand what's gone wrong in our communities. You're asking us to rethink what we're trying to accomplish as therapists. What led you to start changing what you were doing in your own practice?

Pipher: At the time I started writing *Reviving Ophelia* in the early '90s, I was seeing a lot of teenage girls in therapy. As a therapist, I had been taught to look at things like parent-child communication and the mixed messages parents send - all the traditional stuff therapists do with families. But over the past several years, those approaches were becoming less helpful to the families I was seeing. And, of course, I was dealing with my own teenage daughter at the same time. Even though neither my husband nor I have any seriously bad habits and we loved her, she was utterly miserable. She'd wake up happy and come home from school a wreck. Eventually I realised it was not our family that was getting her down. Something else was happening with her.

At the same time, I was seeing a lot of mother-daughter pairs. Most of these mothers were not perfect, but they were pretty good to their daughters. The daughters' anger, their out-of-controlness, just didn't seem to me explainable by looking at the mothers. The more I got to know these girls, the more I realised the issues weren't really about their mother at all. They were about worrying about getting abused in a relationship with a boy or getting hideously teased or the terrible fearfulness of rejection by peers or about hating one's own body. I've always been interested in anthropology and how culture affects people's mental health, so I naturally turned toward looking at society to understand what was going on.

FTN: For centuries, people have been insisting that the younger generation is going to hell in a handbasket. So what's different today?

Pipher: The best description of what I've come to understand about the struggles teenagers face today is a statement from a school superintendent I met in Florida who said, "I would say I came from a dysfunctional family, but I had a functional community and I turned out okay." He said, "My kids have had very functional parents. My wife and I are a real good parenting team. We love each other. We're much better than my parents were at communicating clearly, but our kids are in this very dysfunctional community and they're having a lot more trouble." That statement matched my experience of the world. Today, we are no longer raising our children in a context in which we have a lot of extended family, neighbours and people who are backing us up, who are trying to teach our kids the exact same things we're trying to teach them. A good parent says to children, "You are not the centre of the universe. Your every need does not need to be gratified immediately. It's very important to learn to delay gratification. Sometimes the best thing you can do with suffering is endure it. There is a word *enough* in the English language." But if you want

to teach those things today, you're working against the media that's telling kids, in your own home, "Don't think. Act on impulses." It's absolutely insane. We actually have TVs in our birthing rooms. The first thing a baby can hear when he or she pops out of mom is a TV commercial. And then there's a peer culture that has absorbed all these messages and is echoing them back at your children.

FTN: You also talk about the need for families to make connections in their communities. Why is that so important these days?

Pipher: You cannot have good mental health if you live in a lousy community. We're all connected. Trying to just fix your family is like going first class on the Titanic. It doesn't work. If you want your children to be happy, you've got to make other people's children happy and try to create a world in which all children have some support. And the essential thing that's happened to children now is they're moving among strangers and that means two things. It means they aren't getting nurturing from other adults besides their parents, and it also means they aren't getting corrected and taught what to do. When you think about it, a world in which children are afraid of adults - and adults are afraid of children, too - is a crazy world. And so for things to start working again, we have to once again be involved with helping other people's children.

FTN: Do you see any signs that people are starting to do that?

Pipher: One of the examples I use now comes from something that happened here in Lincoln. We've started to have gangs in our town, which is a wonderful example of a problem that cannot be solved one family at a time. In my opinion, what gangs are about is community. Kids desperately need community, and if they don't find it in a good, healthy way, they will find it in an unhealthy way. And so the solution to gangs is community and that's the only solution. And we had a good positive example of our community dealing with gangs recently.

We had some gang activity in a park right by one of our junior highs. Gang kids were bullying younger children who play there and frightening off old people and young couples with babies. But we had a real good principal at this school, and he called a meeting of the people who live in the neighbourhood - the parents of the younger kids who play there, some school people and the gang kids - for a big meeting in which he presented the problems and said, "We all need to work together to solve these, including you gang kids. We want you to tell us what it is you need from us, how we can help you have better lives." And the kids started talking about what they thought the rules for the park should be. And that park is now the best park in town. It's got adult supervision during high-use times of the day. It's got people there helping kids with activities. And one of the kids who'd been a gang kid was quoted in the paper as saying, "I just wanted to find some people to belong to and I like the people I'm with now more than I liked the gang people." It's very touching, isn't it?

FTN: Sure, but I wonder how many people really think changes like that are possible. How do you keep from sounding like you're just giving people an old-fashioned civics lecture?

Pipher: When I talk about cultural change, people's eyes glaze over. So what I've learned to say is cultural change is one person after another doing the right thing. It's very simple. The only way cultures change is when people do things that take energy and courage and kindness. And everybody is capable of cultural change. The problem is our cynicism, which is the most enervating emotion a person can have. I'm not a cynical person and I try to help people who are cynical see that it's a cheap, easy emotion, and that it's both harder and more fun to try to change things. So I try to make the argument that for your own mental health, for your own intellectual stimulation, go try to change the world.

FTN: In your books you keep emphasising the mischief that therapists have created in the culture. What did we do wrong?

Pipher: By focusing exclusively on internal aspects of families and ignoring the culture, what we did was encourage people to see the enemy as being within their family. When people today are stressed as individuals and stressed as a unit, we've taught them to blame themselves and blame each other. I think the stories we've told people about why their families aren't working better have been inadequate. What we've done, along with the pop psychology industry, is foster a climate in which people's explanation for their private misery is their family-of-origin. To me that's a horrible thing to do, because families are people's safety net in this culture and, problematic as they might be, if you have a stroke tomorrow, the people who are going to take care of you are your family. And I think therapists, particularly, bear a heavy responsibility when we alienate people from their families. After all, therapists don't invite their clients to Thanksgiving dinner. We don't pay their rent if they lost a job, or send their children birthday presents. And so when we isolate them from people who do, I think we do something very dangerous.

As James Hillman has pointed out, for the last 30 years, when the middle class has been in pain, they've gone into therapy. But while that may have been helpful to some individuals, it meant people have been encouraged to substitute therapy for social action. So somebody unhappy with the school system will go to a school psychologist, get their kid tested and use therapy to enable their particular child to have a little better experience as opposed to saying, "These schools aren't working for kids now. I'm going to get involved with other parents to change the school system."

FTN: So you think therapists haven't been countercultural enough?

Pipher: At our worst, therapists have said the same thing advertisers say "Do whatever you feel like. If it feels good, it is good. What's important is that you meet your own needs all the time. If people are burdensome to you, get rid of them." We've

tried so hard to be nonjudgmental, to help guilty people not feel so guilty, that we've had blinders on regarding some of the bad choices people make.

FTN: Can you give me a concrete example of what you're talking about?

Pipher: Okay, I've had clients come in and say, "My mother's dying and she really wants me to come see her while she's in the hospital, but she has never been there for me. I don't see why I should have to do that." I frankly think that not visiting her is a very bad choice. No matter how bad your mother is, when she's dying, it's probably a good idea to go have a talk with her, even if you don't feel you can forgive her. But I'll struggle with how to say that to the client because there are different levels of addressing moral issues. For example, you can say, "Well, let's talk about this," which just suggests don't make up your mind so fast. Or you might say, "Well, could you possibly have regrets later?" which might push a client a little bit, since that kind of question is really a suggestion. Or you might push them a little bit further "Well, is it possible that five years from now you'll think 'Even though I was really in a chaotic situation at the time my mother died and really hated her, perhaps it would have been better to go have one last conversation'". It can start to be pretty leading, setting it up so there's only one answer. So I struggle with that. It isn't that I mind influencing people - I think therapists should influence people -

but it's more a question of how to effectively influence that person. And also there is another dimension, which is staying pretty humble about knowing what another person should do. We have to be careful about getting arrogant and making other people's choices for them.

FTN: It's one thing to acknowledge that this is a profession laden with values, and it's another to begin imposing your values on clients. How do you make sure you don't start down that slippery slope?

Pipher: I absolutely hate the slippery slope metaphor. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union will end up taking an absolutely ridiculous stance because, in my opinion, they're as rigid as the old generals were in Vietnam about "one step in this direction and we'll soon have no liberty at all." If you hold by a slippery slope theory of anything, you're absolutely locked into a position that allows you no freedom to move. And it's not a good idea to see anything that way.

FTN: You seem to be saying that therapy must change because clients need something different from what they used to need.

Pipher: Thirty years ago people felt guilty and overly socialised. When I was in my twenties, I needed help breaking out of all that stuff and not feeling so guilty if I had a glass of wine or went dancing or said the word shit, which is something that would have killed my family if they had heard it. That's not the way people are now. Children grow up hearing swear words from the time they're

2 or 3 years old. People don't for the most part, come into therapy because they're overburdened with guilt and social control. They come in desperately looking for meaning, for guidance in making moral decisions, for some kind of way to think about their problem that has more depth than what they're experiencing when they watch TV.

For example, I have an acquaintance with several children at home who recently had an affair. Not only did she have an affair, but she told everyone about it. She'd show up at parties and talk about how great sex was with her lover. We were all aware of how much her husband and children were suffering, and it was very awkward to hear this woman saying, "Boy, sex is great in the forties if you have a new young lover." But we also felt, "Well, what do we say about this? We're nonjudgmental. We don't tell other people how to live." But I think people often come into therapy because they're trying to sort out things like, should I end this affair or not? Should I let my teenager who has made a girl pregnant abandon the girl because it's not convenient for him? And they need help making moral decisions because the context in which people made moral decisions in the past has evaporated.

FTN: How do you handle moral dilemmas like that in therapy?

Pipher: In fact, not long ago, I saw the mother of a boy who had gotten a girl pregnant. The two teenagers were not in love and the mother was very concerned that her son, who didn't want to marry the girl, was going to be saddled with child support payments for the next 20 years. I listened to the mother and her concerns, but then framed my questions in a way that made it clear to her that I felt her son had a responsibility to his child. Instead of saying, "Well, what do you want to advise your son to do?" I said something like, "Well, given that your son is responsible for this child, how do you think he can best manage?" Within the question, there's a statement that says "Your son has a responsibility here."

FTN: In *The Shelter of Each Other*, you talk about therapy theories having "a short shelf life." What are the main differences between what you do now and the approaches in which you were trained?

Pipher: I started out with the same teachers in my head as everyone else - Satir, Minuchin, Haley, Whitaker. Then I got interested in the same people everyone else was talking about in the late '80s - Michael White, David Epston, Harriet Lerner, Steve deShazer and Carol Anderson. It's funny to think today about some of the things I once accepted without question. I remember Carl Whitaker once saying that if somebody kills him or herself, somebody else in the family wanted them dead. I accepted it back then, but now I realise that's a horrible thing to say. So today instead of thinking "Oh, the wise guru has spoken," it's more like, "Wow! What a load to dump on a family!"

Ten years ago, I would spend a lot more time talking with families about their feelings about each other and their family-of-origin than I do today. I would have focused on the way people communicate with each other and so on. These days, I spend much of the time treating people's schedules. I find that the problems most families bring into therapy today are directly or indirectly

related to time. So instead of asking people to make I-statements or exploring family history, I'll say things like, "You need more time with your kids. You're going to have to make hard choices." Another thing I talk about with almost every family is getting people's lives to be congruent with their values. So I'll ask fairly early on, "What are your values? What is it you want for yourself, for your family? If you can define that, then we can make decisions about whether or not to change your job or make this other major decision." So I'm much more likely to talk to people about values - that is the North Star that orients their life - rather than feelings or their communication style.

FTN: When, if ever, do you stop treating people's schedule, or trying to expand their view of the culture and move into looking at what's going on inside their family?

Pipher: First of all, I start by trying to be a good listener and really understand people's situations. I ask a lot of questions about their work situation, their money situation, and their time. Plus I pretty much ask the standard questions other therapists ask. I don't always leap to the assumption that the culture is the problem, because sometimes it isn't. It may be that the parents drink too much or the parents don't like each other or a child has a deep biological depression that's screwing things up for her. But it seems to me that as the culture becomes more hostile for families and more difficult to navigate, it often makes more sense to look outside the family to understand the problems people are dealing with. So it's a question of relative degree. But in my own clinical experience, even in the last five years, more and more people come in talking more about how they are being hurt by the culture. Instead of saying, "My wife won't talk to me," they now say, "My company is being downsized and I'm being asked to relocate. What am I going to do about my three teenagers?" That's a very different issue from, "My wife and I don't have a good sex life."

FTN: It sounds like you're saying that the therapist's main job in today's world is helping people get clear about the values they want to live by. How do you do that in your own life?

Pipher: I don't want to give the impression that I have all of this perfectly worked out. Like everyone else, I struggle to figure out what my values actually are. Recently, to help me make decisions, I've come up with a mnemonic device that reminds me of what I consider important in my life. It's not in order of priorities, because I don't think values can be rank ordered. I think of personal values as being in a sort of a circle, all of them equally important. I mean, which is more important to you, love or work? Love and work are *both* important. So in my own life I came up with five things and my mnemonic device is alliteration. What's important to me is to have *relationships* with people I love. It's important to me to *realise* my potential as a writer and a therapist. It's important to me to be *relaxed*. It's important to me to be *respected*. And it's important to me to have *results* in the culture as an effect of my actions. Those are the five things I am about and I try to make decisions based on them. Since *Reviving Ophelia*, I found myself having to make decisions I would never in a million years ever imagined having to figure out. For instance, several film makers have wanted to do movies of *Reviving Ophelia*. That has nothing to do with any of the things I value. I'd lose control of a project like that. It could hurt my respect. I have no reason to

think TV movies cause results in the culture, and so on and so on.

FTN: You write about the need for therapists to help families develop "walls". What does that mean?

Pipher: It's become clearer and clearer to me that if families just let the culture happen to them, they end up fat, addicted, broke, with a house full of junk and no time. At first, the idea that families should have walls bothered me as a philosophical idea because it sounded sort of isolationist, like we needed to build castles with little moats around them. But as I've looked at the problem I've realised that families need to both protect their members and connect with the world. The parents in many liberal families I know try to maintain an attitude of being open to experience and not putting too many restrictions on their kids. They haven't learned to make careful judgments about how to hold the culture at bay. So their kids often get caught up in the chaos of the culture's junk values. Regardless of political philosophy, one concrete way to protect families is to treat their schedules and help them protect time. And different families do it differently. For example, one way our family protected time when our kids were at home - we still do - is we don't answer the phone when we don't want to. We don't answer the phone during meals. And I don't actually answer the phone after 8.00 at night, because I don't like to talk to people after 8.00. I'm very tired. I lose IQ points as the day does on, and by 8.00 at night I'm not that much good as a conversationalist.

Another way families can protect time is to just make some conscious decisions that we don't have TVs and radios and stereos and computers on between this time and that time, or three days a week or whatever. One question I ask people as a matter of routine now is, "Tell me about your average day. What's your average workday like?" And then based on what they say, I'll say, "Well, if you were to do some experiments with protecting time, what would you do? Where would you want to start? What would you maybe shoot for, and why don't you try that and then report back how it works?" I don't say, "Don't watch TV!" I say, "Why don't you try some experiments and let me know how this goes for your family."

FTN: I would imagine some clients aren't particularly able or eager to try these experiments or see their problems in cultural terms.

Pipher: There's a lot of variation in how people respond. Some people are not particularly interested in looking at the culture and there have been cases that turned into a struggle between me and a client. For example, I had an adolescent girl in therapy who was very large and plain. She also had a family history of depression. She may have had some biological-based depression, but she was also going to a junior high where all of her talents - she was very good in math and music and loved science - were not appreciated. On the other hand, all of her flaws were incredibly important to her peers, and she was getting very depressed. So when I saw her, I suggested that she start doing some volunteer work that would connect her to people who weren't in the seventh grade. I wanted her to develop some hobbies and interests that took her out of her peer culture. Her parents, on the other hand, were determined that her problems be interpreted as a biological-based depression and that she be put on

medication. They took her to a psychiatrist here in town who's very prone to heavy medication and he won't communicate with other therapists. That was a case where I really had a show-down with the parents. I told them, "Two therapists can be worse than none at all. If you're seeing me and I'm talking about your daughter's problems in terms of her need to connect with people outside her peer circle, and then you're seeing this other doctor who is talking to you about medication and how she may need to be hospitalised, you'll be utterly confused. So you're going to have to choose between us." That particular family chose the doctor and I lost that girl, but that's very rare.

FTN: If you're going to be a messenger about reordering priorities in families, it's natural for people to be curious about how you handle decisions about time and money in your own family. Would you mind talking a bit about that.

Pipher: Well, I'm not sure my experience generalises that well to other people. I think one reason I look at things the way I do is that my dad had a stroke at 50. So like many people who had a parent die young, I've never had this illusion that life goes on forever. I've always been extremely conscious that we only have so much time in this life. The other thing is that Jim and I have been fortunate to have always had enough money to meet our basic needs. That's allowed us to have a different definition of

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Letters

Mr Brian Wooller
Branch President

Dear Brian

I would like to thank the Western Australian Branch of the AASW for allowing me the opportunity to attend the annual State Social Work Conference as the sponsored rural/remote social worker. I found the conference immensely valuable. It provided me with an excellent opportunity to meet other social workers and to learn more about social work as a profession.

The conference sessions were enjoyable, informative and relevant to social work students. The Working with Aboriginal People Skills Workshop was extremely interesting given my current position as a social work student at Family and Children's Services in the West Kimberley District. Attendance at the conference has enabled me to disseminate information to student colleagues at Edith Cowan, Bunbury, and staff in the West Kimberley District. It has also influenced the scope of my thinking about ethical issues in every day social work practice.

I encourage you to offer similar sponsorship to rural and remote social workers in the future. It is essential that these practitioners are encouraged and able to access continued education and professional development opportunities.

I look forward to a successful and interesting career as a social worker and an involved association with the AASW.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Appleton
Social Work Student, Edith Cowan University
3 September 1997

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Sharleen Delane (Golden Mile Community House)
Kerryann Dusseldorp (Fremantle Hospital)

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wealth than many people. If wealth is defined as that which you value most highly, for us, wealth has never meant money. I think a mistake many middle-class Americans make is not knowing the meaning of the word *enough*. So they have more money than they need, but they don't realise that, and keep working and making decisions based on money when they don't need to. After all, one way to be poor is not to know the meaning of the word *enough*.

We've never worked more than we've needed to and we don't buy stuff. I mean, I would be so happy if I could wear sweatclothes all the time. I like sweatclothes. They're cheap. They're functional. They're comfortable. What I say to clients about time and money is, "You can't have both. You have to make very hard decisions. Those decisions have to reflect your value system. And if what you say you truly value is time with your kids, then you may need to make some different decisions so you have time with them." I tell them that one thing to do before they buy anything is to evaluate how many hours they have to work to get it. Say you want to buy a \$500 television set and you have a minimum wage job, so that with taxes and everything, you're talking about working 120 hours. The question then becomes, do you want that TV more than \$500 worth of family vacation money or 120 hours of time?

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Tracey Nicolson (Student Associate)
Patricia Plawiak (Student Associate)
Carol Putt (Student Associate)
Natalie Rae (Student Associate)
Felicity Ralph (Southwell Child Development Centre)
Rachel Resuggan (Commonwealth Service Delivery Agency)
Pamela Richardson (Student Associate)
Margaret Rosete (Student Associate)
Joy Simpson (Student Associate)
Diane Smith (Student Associate)
Georgina Sneddon (Student Associate)
Louise Steels (Hollywood Private Hospital)
Helenmary Sykes (Student Associate)
Irene Tapp (Student Associate)
Elly Trotti (Student Associate)
Carolyn Vermeulen (Student Associate)
Karen Watts (Student Associate)
Donna Wilson (Hollywood Private Hospital)

THE UNI SOCIAL WORK SCHOOLS

University of Western Australia

In writing an item for the WA branch's newsletter I wanted to provide some sense of the flavour of social work at UWA. My own circumstances prevented me from having enough time to compile a profile of the staff at UWA, and so I have narrowed this piece to two items: a) a profile of the head of department – Professor Jim Ife, and b) a collection of interviews with current students. It is by chance rather than design, but I believe the student comments resonate considerably with the view of Professor Ife. While the omission of a profile on the other staff is a significant gap, I hope what follows paints a picture of the some of the major themes at the UWA Social Work School. Peter Clissa, AASW student representative

Professor Jim Ife – Head of the School of Social Work & Chair of Social Work at UWA

Professor Jim Ife was appointed head of the School of Social Work in 1997, and to the Chair of Social Work at UWA in Nov 1996. Jim has been at UWA since 1986 and was also head of the department in 1991 & 1992. Jim began his career in social work with a BSW from the University of Sydney in 1967. The course at the University of Sydney was itself fairly conventional and conservative, even though the late 1960's saw a significant rise in political activism around social justice issue like race relations, and the validity of, and Australia's involvement in, the Vietnam War.

Following graduation Jim worked for two year in the Mental Health Services in NSW before moving to Toronto – Canada, where he worked in child welfare for a year. In 1971 he enrolled in a Masters of SW at McGill University in Montreal. The course at McGill emphasised for Jim the importance of incorporating critical social policy and political analysis into social work. It also gave him exposure to the value and effectiveness of community work and direct political action (in this case the poverty movement of the time) (in effect the value of acting from the margins). From 1972 to 73 Jim worked in community planning in London - Ontario.

In 1974 Jim returned to Australia – to the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education in Hobart, where he undertook his Ph D at the University of Tasmania – titled: 'The determination of Social Need'. His work in Hobart, particularly with Adam Jamrozik, produced a strong sociological focus to his work (particularly class analysis).

In 1980 Jim moved to WA and became a Senior Lecturer at the School of Social Work, Western Australian Institute of Technol-

ogy (now Curtin University). In 1981 he became head of the school. It was during this time that he began exploring a critique of positivist paradigms in social work, (work that would eventually lead to him writing 'Re-thinking Social Work' -1997). During this period Jim was president of WACOSS (1983/84), and the Australian Association for Social Work & Welfare Education 1981 to 1983.

At the end of 1986 Jim moved from WAIT to a Senior Lecture position at UWA – essentially to allow him more time for teaching and writing. In the late 1980's Jim's interest was the incorporation material from the environmental and green movements into formal social work theory and education.

In addition to his academic work, from 1991 to 1994 Jim was State President of Amnesty International Australia, and National President from 1994 to 1996. He is also currently the Human Rights Commissioner for the International Federation of Social Workers in the Asia Pacific region. This role is essentially aimed at mobilising support for social workers in trouble because of their political practice. Another key objective of this role is to encourage human rights awareness in social workers. Recently Jim has also written two books – *Community development* published in 1995, and *Rethinking social work* published in 1997.

Drawing from Jim's recent Inaugural Lecture as appointee to the Chair of Social Work, the following is a rough sketch of Jim's current interests and concerns for the future of social work. The lecture was titled: Privatisation, Globalisation and Pauperisation: Social Services in the New World Order. My summary is an all too brief outline of Jim's talk, and leaves out many issues and the material Jim draws on to substantiate his position. My summary is also informed by his book *Rethinking social work*. What struck me when writing this was just how much it resonated with the themes from the student interviews.

Jim explains the title of his talk thus: "both privatisation and globalisation are leading to a new pauperisation in the form of economic exclusion (*both individually and nationally*), and that in working towards the vision of social justice and human rights, which are the core of social work practice, we need to be providing a critique of, and an alternative to, both these orthodoxies"(pg.3) (my italic). For Jim Ife, in an era of declining support for the humanistic values of human rights and social justice, "where individualism and selfishness are the norm, simply to help another person becomes a radical act, which challenges the existing order, and social work, as a profession explicitly committed to social justice, is therefore inevitably radical"(pg.2).

Jim does not want to be read as missing or understating the value of traditional social work practice in mainstream settings. Drawing from his book *Rethinking social work* Jim argues the mainstream is an important setting that allows social workers to

critique and work against the inherent contradictions in economic rationalism and managerialism. But, in the current environment, (*or - in terms of the potential for corrective change*) Jim also believes that, if social work is to survive as a coherent discipline, remaining true to its core values, it will need to move beyond its identification with, and dependence on the Welfare State, along with its primary reliance on the individualised helping relationship. It is at the *very-global* international, and very local – community based levels, that Jim believes there is room and freedom for social workers to work within critical practice framework, and ultimately take part in the creation of alternate, viable, and humanistically centred social systems.

In an era of expansive economic globalisation, an internationalist perspective not only provides much needed insight into the broader dynamics of 'Economic Rationalism', and its vehicles of privatisation and managerialist practice, it also highlights possible avenues of effective resistance.

An international perspective on the dynamics of economic globalisation allows us to bring new insight and strategies to the national issues – to link and gain support from people and communities facing similar issues, to form cohesive and sustained opposition and alternate community structures. An internationalist perspective also highlights how economic marginalisation is happening at the level of whole nations – at the expense of human rights and equality. And so it draws us to a "reaffirmation of the internationalist ideal in its original form before it was high-jacked by the economic rationalists... international co-operation, understanding and tolerance, based on universal principles of human rights, peace and social justice" (pg.16). It is in this area that the "International Federation of Social Worker has... taken significant initiatives", and other international organisations "more often than not, desperately seek the kind of skills and commitment social workers can offer" (Rethinking social work, 1997, pg.193).

At the local level, in common with much of the current discussion in social work, Jim Ife sees that privatisation and the tendering-out of community service functions, in its managerialist form, has not only led to a sharp decline in net funding, but also an (often discussed) increase in the amount of political control exercised over exactly what work is funded, and who can access these services (pg.8-10). This immediate future presents an environment where social workers operating within traditional institutional settings are likely to find their work increasing de-valued and deprofessionalised (pg. 12), and their freedom to practice within social works value base (and be inclusive of clients and community needs) significantly circumscribed.

Local communities can seem irrelevant to the large political picture, but their are also sites where "the forces of international capital [and institutional control] are generally at their weakest" (pg.17). As such they provide the maximum opportunity and freedom for "community-based initiatives which in their own way challenge the orthodox view of the world and of economics, as people take matters into their own hands and seek their own practical solutions" (pg.17). At the very local level of community based activity, "grounded in human rights, social justice and citizenship" (pg.16) that social workers can make a difference.

At the risk of over-simplifying Jim's position; as a student at UWA my reading of Jim is that – at the moment there is significant pessimism about the formal future of social work, and the struggle to remain true to its core values. But, if we look beyond the traditional institutional settings, and the limits of the individualised helping relation, then there exist significant opportunity for the rewarding and productive use of social work skills, the re-assertion of community and social justice values, and therefore a valuable future role for social workers. In many respects I see that he is suggesting we invert the phrase 'working on behalf of the marginalised' and actually 'work in the margins' with some optimism that the currently dominant paradigms are inherently unstable, and will fracture (some signs of which are already evident).

Student experiences of the social work course at UWA and their field placements

What follows is a collage of 1st and 2nd year comments about the course and the experience of being social work students. I want to acknowledge that the idea for doing this is derived from the work of the other two schools. Chance circumstance played a significant part in who I interviewed, but I have attempted to explore a balance of views.

In conducting the interview for this material I was particularly interested in the personal experience and unresolved issues that were salient to each interviewee. Because the interviews were largely unstructured, and I've aimed at being authentic to the material, the text(s) do follow consistent frame. Even so, the individual experience and opinions of the students strongly echo the current debates in social work.

Bernie (a first year student, with a prior degree in education; 1st placement, community work in aged care).

At this point Bernie really loves the course and has positive expectations about being a social worker "given the right context and political climate". For Bernie a critical component of the course to date has been the social policy unit that "provided a framework and language for understanding what was really going on" – to see below the surface of public issue. For Bernie the insights that have come from this analysis have generated considerable anger. Beyond this, a salient issue for Bernie at present is "the tension between dealing with the present – with the resources and structures available, and being aware of, and actively seeking, opportunities for change". Put in other terms – "the struggle in choosing whether to push for change and be marginalised, or conform, ... and a concern about compliance leading to complacency".

Bernie's placement also raised issue around social works identity - "what do you bring to the client if you are a generalist... and where is the basis of identity in this", particularly when most sections of society are either against social work values, or unaware of what social workers do. For her there is an experience that "we need to stake our claim, or run the risk of becoming obsolete". Couple to this is the issue of public perception, that she believe the professional bodies need to do more about.

Myles (a 2nd year student, with a prior degree in education; 1st placement St John of God Hospital; 2nd placement Gay and Lesbian Counseling Service)

As part of a career change Myles chose the two year social work course, instead of educational psychology, because it gave him rapid access to the individual work he was seeking, and it located personal issues in context. Myles feels that the course has given him a “better understanding of the personal/political connection – of applied sociology – where the individual stands in the political, personal, economic and social web”.

The course provides general models, not intensive skills. But the general models can be drawn on to inform social worker work, and guide us where to look. In term of his placement, one salient experience for him was the difficulty in converting theory to practice, with all the unexpected variability that individuals present. In this same vein, he see that the course would benefit from more dialogue based teaching models.

Nicola (a 1st year student, previous degree psychology; 1st placement, Community Legal and Advocacy Centre)

Nicola chose social work because it offered the opportunity to address social justice issues. While she enjoys the course because it is friendly and relaxed, she sees that the stated aim of pursuing social justice fails a lot of the time. Nicola enjoyed her placement because it allowed her to “operate at the personal and political levels – to operate at many levels and see the positive impact of this”. Even so, one of the core issues that Nicola sees it that “the theory in the course about linking the personal and political is good, but it doesn’t work in the real world, except in a few settings”.

“I can link the personal and political in my own mind, but how does this help the client”. Nicola sees that there is still a big gap between a social worker assisting an individual understanding their personal situation in broader contexts, and actually achieving empowerment. The other tension Nicola notes is “that between the costs of radical practice, and conforming so that your life is professional life is manageable”.

Carolyn (a 1st year student, previous degree sociology & 3 years of law; 1st placement Royal Perth Hospital)

Carolyn was drawn to social work because of her strong social conscience, and her experience of sociology and law being too abstract. She wanted a course that directly confronted issues in a humanistic framework, where you “actually deal with people”. In terms of her original motivations, the course has met her expectations, and has been a source of motivation and excitement, and provided space for her personal experiences.

While the course has delivered what she expected, Carolyn’s placement highlighted for her the way formal settings don’t allow for, or support, radical practice. She had a sense that the organisation “wanted social workers to tidy up the nasty edges, without actually critiquing or challenging the system”. Along with others in the course, she already notes the tension between practicing critically (in accordance with her value base), and practicing so as

to have a manageable and viable career path. Her placement also highlighted the gap between, what at times is, excessively optimistic theory and a world increasingly less interested in social work values.

Marie (a 2nd year student, with a previous background in arts; 1st placement, State Head Injuries Unit, 2nd placement, Graylands Psychiatric Hospital)

For Marie the important positive dimensions of the course have been the cohesiveness of the student group, the breadth of the material covered, and the skills this has generated. She “liked the challenge of having to be clear about where you stand on a number of issues, and that the course provides a safe environment in which to do this”.

But for her there remains a sense of dis-ease about “how I fit into the traditional social work roles, and what exactly are my responsibilities towards the society I live in”. In parallel with other students, an area that remains uncomfortable and un-resolved for her is that of the contradictions between care and control roles, and the increasing emphasis on control in statutory settings. She also experiences “the danger of being subsumed in the system, and of no longer being aware of the contradictions” and tensions between these tasks.

In terms of her own practice, Marie’s preference is for client focussed roles of advocacy, empowerment, etc — but she see these being increasingly marginalised and undervalued. What is satisfying for Marie is operating from her value base, but she sees the opportunity for doing this shrinking. But, Marie sees lots of opportunity beyond the traditional social work roles, and feels that the current debate about the currently gloomy future of social work has not been productive. There is a lot of discussion, but “what are we doing about it as individuals and as a collective group”.

Jackie (a first year student, with a prior degree in psychology; 1st placement, Family and Children Services)

Jackie chose social work because “psychology was distant and removed from contact with people, and you didn’t have an opinion – you had to used someone else’s”. In short Jackie “wanted to get her hands dirty”. The personal and cooperation nature of the student and faculty group has played a major part in her positive experience of the course.

Jackie really enjoyed her experience at F&CS, and feels that provided you can navigate the large bureaucracy working there can be quite rewarding. Issues which she is still resolving from her placement are those around the limits of confidentiality in a large organisation, and the struggle to be effectively a surrogate parent to state wards, when resources are limited.

Of the ‘political’ issues raised by other students, Jackie and Louise (another first year student, whose placement was Mofflyn) believe that it’s artificial to claim that specific issues are salient and motivating when you have little direct experience of them. In this respect, the placements play a vital role in making people passionate about issues.

Emma (a 2nd year student, previous education psychology; 1st placement, RPH Rehabilitation, 2nd placement, F&CS Mirrabooka)

Emma came to social work because she wanted more personal contact and a humanistic framework that psychology did not offer. But she sees social work still struggling to achieve these objectives and that “you need to make a concerted personal effort to make contact with the client”. Emma feels that good personal contact depends very much on the individual, rather than formal education, and there is a *constant* danger of this contact failing in practice.

Emma is happy about her choice of doing social work, but believes the course could benefit considerably from providing “more exposure to what it’s like being the consumers/clients of social workers” and social work services. Her other criticism of social work education is “that we are very much focussed on voluntary clients and helping relationships”, where this isn’t the case in many instances. The formal education leaves you to work out for yourself how to deal with negative clients – how to negotiate, trade and contract. In this sense Emma sees that “much of the learning that is critical [to being a social worker] happens personally, and if you don’t get the right placement opportunities it doesn’t happen”

Tina (a 2nd year student, previous degree anthropology; 1st placement, WA Greens party, 2nd placement ASeTTS)

Of the course at UWA Tina says that: “the social work course has been an excellent way of putting my theoretical sociological background into practice”. Tina “didn’t get into social work specifically to help people at the individual level, rather to collectively work towards making change at a macro level”. The course has been what she expected, but her learning has been far greater than she expects, and she feels that she has learnt far more from fellow students than from the course proper.

Against the back ground of this positive experience Tina believes that often too much is expected of the course and the department. In her experience it is a good department comparatively, and it’s often forgotten by the critics that the department has to run within the parameters of a university setting. In terms of critique, Tina sees a separation in the department staff, and the student population, between, traditional case-work like practice, and more community and politically focussed social work. To paraphrase her; this separation exists in the world, social work doesn’t deal with it effectively, and therefore the students don’t deal with it.

Two contemporary issue in social work concern Tina. The first is the tension between care and control roles - you can recognise the issues, but reconciling them remains elusive. In working this issue through for herself Tina is choosing to move away from the area involving statutory or institutional control. (Some would argue that the two are irreconcilable and that they should be separated).

The second issue is that of re-framing the personal experience of clients into political contexts. For Tina a current question is

“how do you work to get [political] understanding in your clients, when most of the time your contact with them is brief, and they haven’t had the opportunity to expand their own political awareness”.

In terms of the future of social work as a discipline, Tina sees “the environment is forcing people to have an opinion, but [she] does not have that much confidence about people falling on the side of asserting social justice”. Tina sees that we still have some way to go along the new-right path, especially given the expansive phenomena of economic globalism. In particular she notes the way the New Right is using the language of social justice but inverting its meaning.

Curtin University

An interview by Mick Hadley with the Head of the School of Social Work at Curtin University of Technology Professor Richard Hugman (for publication in Stokal).

Professor Richard Hugman is the new Head of the Social Work School at Curtin University. Richard trained as a social worker in Sheffield having done a Social Anthropology and Sociology degree at the University of Hull. He worked as a social worker in Sheffield and then went on to the University of Lancaster and did his PhD looking at the development of social work within large government social welfare agencies and their relationship with each other. He returned into the field as a senior social worker managing a joint health and social services projects, working with elderly people and then went back to Lancaster as a lecturer in the Department of Applied Science where he worked for 10 years before migrating to Australia.

Did you publish during your period in Lancaster University?

I published three books - *Power in Caring Professions* is the first one, the second is called *Ageing and the Care of Older People in Europe* and the third one is an edited book that I did with David Smith, called *Ethical Issues in Social Work*. David and I were joint editors of the *British Journal of Social Work* for four years, which is the main academic social work journal in that country and it is sold internationally.

Why did you decide to come to Australia?

I came to Australia partly to set up a social work programme at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Bunbury and partly to try a major life transition of moving to a different country. The main attraction for me I guess was because of the fact it was a rural campus and their programme has a particularly regional and remote focus to it. I was very interested to see how that was going to tie in with some of the other things I had been doing in rural England.

The other thing about the Edith Cowan job was doing research. I was also directing the Centre for Rural Health and Community Development at that campus, which cut across social welfare and health service issues. I say health service, but we were not looking at medical practice other than as an objective research inquiry. More broadly we were looking at health services and the broader issues around them.

How did you come to select Curtin University?

I already had some research links with Curtin from the UK. We are part of a four nation comparative longitudinal study and at the University of Lancaster we had two people who had come to WA at various times to do pieces of work. Harry Blagg, who is still in WA, well he came back

to WA, he worked in the Premier's Office for Brian Burke, and subsequently is now working at UWA and David Thorpe who did a lot of work with what was then DCS and is now Family and Children's Services, on child protection. David had a PhD student who taught at Curtin and who's till working and living in Australia but is registered to do her PhD at the University of Lancaster in the UK. So we were meeting some people from America and we decided to set this project up while Heather was actually in Lancaster, and from that Australia got drawn into it.

On placement that is a mix of Curtin, UWA and ECU students and there are suggestions that there is a difference between them, in terms of the stage of the social work course, social work attitudes etc. Are there any plans to align the various social work schools?

There are certainly no current plans. I meet regularly with the Heads of those other programmes, and bearing in mind I was the Head of School at Edith Cowan University before I came here, I'm already very familiar with that anyway, but I also know Jim Ife, who is now the Professor and the Head of School at UWA. Myself, Jim Ife and Pauline Meemeduma, who is now the Associate Professor ECU and Head down at Bunbury, meet to share ideas about the three programmes. What I would expect in the future would be a clearer positioning of the three programmes in relation to each other which will be about recognising and valuing the differences between them in terms of the content, and the style and the structures because those programmes are both two years and ours is four years. We also have the Family Studies degree located at this School and ECU Bunbury teach some general Social Science, while at UWA they're basically social work or what is called social work and social administration.

The major differences at the moment is in the post graduate field. It seems that most people in WA when they think of doing a higher degree, automatically think of UWA. However in terms of numbers of post graduate students this School is actually not far behind. I mean we have large numbers of post graduates and I think that should be recognised, probably because many of them are part time I would think all three of us are going to develop further in that area, both because that is what universities want us to do but also because social work as a profession has brought us in this continuing professional education whereby to maintain people's credibility as a social worker, the idea is you demonstrate you are continuing to take responsibility for your own professional education after initial qualifications. So to provide more opportunities for people I think will become something that students will respond to.

We meet regularly to talk about placements. One of the things that I find is that agencies do not always understand that there are legitimate reasons for the Universities operating in different ways. There are a couple of agencies that I think would find it easier if we all worked in exactly the same way, all had the same placement dates and had the same course structures and so on. But we are different Universities and just as we don't ask for them, the agencies to be all the same, equally, we can't all be the same.

Field placement

Field placements are an important part of the Bachelor of Social Work Degree and as I understand it they are compulsory if the degree is to be recognised by the AASW. It is therefore frustrating to find out that it is becoming increasingly difficult to place students in the field. When students are placed, it is often at short notice creating unnecessary pressure as children have to be placed in day care centres and appropriate clothing needs to be purchased. Positions sometimes do not supply the range of experiences desired and, in addition, late starting dates eat into holiday times.

There seems to be a number of reasons for the increasing difficulty of acquiring field work positions. Firstly, there seems to be an increasing number of students on human service field placements from TAFE and the various universities in Western Australia. Secondly, the present State and Federal governments have reduced, and in some cases cut funding to the human services placing social workers under greater pressure and therefore unable to supervise students. Thirdly, there is the reduction of funding to the universities which in turn reduces the resources for field work positions for students. However, it is useless blaming the economic rationalist policies of the governments, or the increase competition for field work positions. What we need, as students is a strategy put in place that assures all social work students have field work positions. I feel that the AASW has a key role to play in securing such positions as it is in the interest of professional development of the social work profession.

John Ballard

As part of the social work course, I have recently been involved in a participant observation that posed the question "if I knew at the beginning of the course what I know now, would I have started the course?" The simple answer is yes, however many of my ideas have changed since I started the course. I initially wanted to be a counsellor and increase my knowledge of counselling theories and of people. Instead of finding answers all I found were more questions. Frustrating as it was at the time, I persisted, fascinated with the new theories of Marxism, Postmodernism and the many other 'isms' that I have been subjected to in the past two and a half years, only to discover that counselling is probably not for me. This has left me wondering about what I might do when I finish my degree. As it stands at the moment the workplace seems to be changing at such a rate that it would be quite futile to make a decision about my future prospects now. However it is important to have some direction so I am looking at the possibility of being involved with a community development project in India for my fourth year placement. Nevertheless the truth remains that I knew more answers when I started the social work degree than I know now, although I consider myself more prepared for working in such a dynamic workplace than when I started my degree.

Jackie Tomic

Being a second year work student on my first placement initially consisted of a mixture of excitement and anxiety. As the time progressed, a questioning of agency's protocol, expectation of my work, knowledge and competence and the nature of work involved, led to further questioning of my own feelings about the nature of statutory work. Application of theory to practice became a part of regular conversation with work colleagues and fellow students.

Being faced with real issues, presents quite a challenge. That is dealing with client's real life situation brings about feelings and emotions that written material (scenarios) can not possible prepare us for. It becomes a real testing of one's own values and belief systems along with professional ethics and principles which are associated with an individual placement.

In addition to the above, discovering and learning about community resources available within both government and non government institutions presents both personal and professional growth. Personally earning from the practical perspective is enjoyable, challenging and effective.

Elly Trotti

I would like to tell you about my final year placement which was spent at the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) East Perth. I had asked for this particular placement because I wanted to work with Betsy Buchanan who is a volunteer at AMS. I had heard that Betsy was highly regarded by many Aboriginal people and I wanted to see how she had gained their trust and respect.

I was apprehensive of how I, a non Aboriginal woman would be received by Aboriginal people. During my initial placement interview at AMS I began to relax. I found myself reflecting back to the initial interview at my first placement which was at Family and Children's Services (FCS) Head Office. I mentally compared the two buildings. The building where AMS is located is a converted warehouse. It has few windows and the main entrance is through a roller shutter doorway. FCS on the other hand is located in a modern office block in "silver city", and comes complete with a tea lady and a shared gym.

The welfare team leader at AMS gave me some very good advice "pretend you know nothing about Aboriginal people". This was the best advice anyone could have given me as I felt I knew very little about working with Aboriginal people. Right from the start I treated everyone as I, given the same set of circumstances, would like them to treat me - and what I didn't know I asked!!! I soon felt warmly welcomed and accepted.

During this placement I assumed the role of client advocate, I also provided support to clients in the welfare section of AMS. I was able to see at first hand how few resources are put into place for Aboriginal people. I experienced the difficulties of working in an agency that is clearly understaffed when the client needs are so demanding. On top of this was the extra pressure put on the AMS by workers in other agencies who under the guise of being "culturally correct" would continually refer clients to the AMS rather than help with "simple" (by simple I mean the referring workers would have been just as able to assist the client as workers at AMS) issues such as accommodation.

Working at AMS is "full on". People "wait" to see someone in welfare from the minute the doors open at 8.30 and they continue to wait all day if they have to. The welfare section deals with issues such as housing and financial problems right through to complex situations such as the Equal Opportunity Board Tribunal.

I would now like to draw your attention to some very disturbing figures. Aboriginal tenancies now account for at least 50% of all Homeswest evictions, even though only 18% of all Homeswest tenancies are occupied by Aboriginal people. I had one case where a family received an eviction notice because of anti-social behaviour. On inquiry to Homeswest it turned out that this anti-social behaviour consisted of (1) a member of the family had asked a neighbour for a cigarette and (2) a member of the family had asked to buy an old table sitting out in the same neighbour's backyard. When I inquired how this constituted anti-social behaviour I was told that anti-social behaviour meant any behaviour that was not warranted by the neighbour!!!

The media relate the crisis of Aboriginal health - yet for many clients who attend AMS their serious health issues come second to their priority which is securing a roof over their head. Although Homeswest offer bond assistance so that people can access private rentals, the reality of this for the majority of Aboriginal people is not an option as few real estate agents will allow them to rent a property. This problem isn't helped by the distorted stories which are presented by the majority of the media. For a more balanced view read *The Australian Magazine*, August 23-24th 1997, pp12-21.

My long term goal is to work with Aboriginal people and as such this placement was a valuable learning experience for me. As well as learning a great deal about another culture, in so doing I was able to learn more about myself and my own culture.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people who I "networked" with - your contributions have been invaluable to me both on campus and on placement. Particularly Betsy Buchanan, Ted Wilkes and all the wonderful crew at AMS Lois Dartness (my telephone lifeline), Bill Curry and Kerry Kemp at FCS.

Family studies: a comment

Whenever something looms on the horizon, some folk wander over and have a look, others scramble for the bushes and others still just warn everyone to stay away. Since the inception of Family Studies in 1995, there have been various reactions from various stakeholders (whoops, jargon!). Some folk have been excited and more than willing to lay themselves open to either criticism or accolade. Others have taken a 'wait and see' approach. Fine.

Based on anecdotal evidence that there's enough suffering out there for us all, Family Studies is (I believe) a healthy and natural evolution in the human service area. The roles of social worker family practitioner are complimentary and mutually supportive - if given the opportunity. In nursing for example, specialisation occurred by necessity as technology and society became more complex. Same for education. Same for law. With greater demands on all human service workers, perhaps it's time to share the load. Wadya say we all try for burn-out rates above the average 8 years?

Von Greenfield (Student representative)

The Rally

The sense of solidarity I witnessed and felt at the Industrial action on 3rd May was an awesome experience. It served to consolidate my belief in the power of people to join forces and stand together defiant against tyranny.

In this case the tyranny of the Court government who insist on ignoring the demands of their constituents (those they work for). This is being done by imposing third wave industrial reform. Industrial reform which has recently been rammed through parliament with apparently no thought of the people the legislation will directly and negatively affect.

To be part of one of the biggest days of action Perth has ever seen was an honour, and to march alongside people from such a wide range of occupations all with a common cause was a powerful experience. The fight is to continue and the more support the unions have the more power they have to demand changes to this draconian legislation.

I urge all social work students to remember that this issue is not just about the rights of paid workers but is about social justice, its about basic human rights. Anyone who believes in the importance of these ideals should consider joining the unions in their struggle, a great way to do this is to participate.

Sharon Morris

Edith Cowan University

A profile of a social work education at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury Campus

Department staff

- Pauline Meemeduma (BSW, MSW, DSW) Head of Department. Practice: cross-cultural, child and family, child protection, disability
- Dyann Ross (BSW, MSW). Practice: mental health, fieldwork practice, women's services, rural services.
- Patricia Sherwood (BA, DipEd, PhD). Practice: human service, counselling, family systems, community development.
- Marilyn Palmer (BSW). Practice: child and family welfare, women's services, research, community welfare.
- Deborah O'Sullivan (BSW). Practice: child and family welfare, regional policy.

Dr Pauline Meemeduma

The opportunity to be involved in the setting up of a new School of Social Work - what an opportunity. Worth trekking across the desert from North Queensland to South West Western Australia. I have only been here seven months - yet it has been all worthwhile. It is enjoyable to be involved in a School of Social Work which reflects in a social work educational process many of my social work practice values. These values are:

- the needs for practice to shape the rationale for and direction of social work education;
- social work practice is uncertain and contested therefore social workers must be theoretically informed and articulate to position and defend their practice through a social work knowledge base;
- social work has and will continue to offer a relevant and valued service to our society;
- social work as a profession must acknowledge itself as a culturally constructed product which to varying degrees may or may not make 'sense' to members of other cultures. The challenge of making our practice culturally relevant is paramount.

I have arrived at this view of social work after twenty-two years as a combined social work practitioner and academic throughout Australia and overseas. I have predominantly worked in child protection, alternate care, family welfare, and cross-cultural practice. I continue to maintain a practice case load in child protection whilst still an academic. AND I continue to love being a social worker.

ECU Program

We wanted the Edith Cowan University (Bunbury Campus) program to:

- be exciting,
- have a specialist emphasis on regional and rural practice and cross-cultural practice to ensure these are at the forefront of social work learning,
- have an integrated teaching-learning model which maintained the cross reference knowledge basis required in practice,
- have excited eager social work colleagues who as students would enter a collaborative teaching-learning exchange as we entered the complex contested arena of social work practice,
- produce social work students who are loud, opinionated, skilled, informed, critical thinkers, who value social work and who will stand up and be counted,

- have staff who knew and related to contemporary social work practice,
- be a social work course that was embedded within the needs of practice, and
- for all to enjoy the social work educational experience - in a great place.

Students at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury Campus are always active participants in a collegial teaching-learning process involved in responding to the complex world of social work practice. The thrill of both teacher and learner is aptly expressed in the students' words.

Rick

A social work education at ECU is full on (for want of a better way of describing it). The challenge is in opening yourself to a new form of learning. Accepting the fact that students are not empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge and wisdom of the "educators", but rather charged with the responsibility for acquiring knowledge and wisdom through a cooperative style of learning. Social work at ECU is a two-year course that just scratches the tip of the iceberg. We are quipped with relevant skills to enter the field as social workers, yet we know that the learning never stops. Social work at ECU prepares its students to act ethically and anti-oppressively in a world that sadly in many cases lacks compassion and social justice.

Ashley

A social work education at ECU is a unique experience. Having been a 'city slicker' most of my life and undertaken tertiary education at various metropolitan universities, both in WA and interstate, the move to the Bunbury campus came with quite an awakening. I had heard that this new course was attempting to provide the many generic social work skills training in an anti-oppressive and interactive learning environment and which provided for specialised training in cross-cultural and rural social work issues. Clearly these aspects of the course attracted me to the Bunbury campus and away from the larger metropolitan universities, however, I remained somewhat sceptical because the course sounded too good to be true. Six months into the course, I am excited to report that it has exceeded all expectations and is by far the most innovative and learning conducive program I could imagine. It really aims at empowering students so as they may empower others!!

Lina

A social work education at ECU is that which supports and nurtures each and every student, catapulting them across a learning curve that stretches and tests every one of the student's boundaries. In conjunction with the most innovative lecturers and contemporary teaching styles flexible enough for any type of student to learn. This course excels in gaining a student's best.

Vera

A social work education at ECU is like stretching the brain until it pings and the electrical energy of the brain picks up so that the lights go on. It is about regurgitating and then critically thinking (reflecting) about the regurgitation and maybe re-regurgitating in a modified way or totally remoulding it all together. We are being moulded and modelled while choosing whom to role model, being taught how not to oppress or abuse all in a rural setting, and in a collaborative environment with the safety net of Pauline, Dyann and Marilyn who constantly pick up the pieces.

Gayle

A social work education at ECU is about *values* such as the importance of articulating your practice, cultural awareness and appropriateness, anti-oppressive practice, empowerment for clients and self and

working towards structural change to produce an improvement in social justice for all.

Skills such as communication, speaking up, critical reflection, conflict resolution, negotiation, compromise, perseverance, listening and being heard, giving and receiving feedback and time management.

Knowledge such as knowing and articulating your knowledge base, theory, theory and more theory, research and research methods, law and the legal method then integrating all this into your own personal practice model.

Briony

A social work education at ECU is unique, invaluable and unlike any other social work course available. Sometimes referred to as radical, it stands alone for its fresh and exciting approach to the teaching and learning process. A social work education at ECU provides the student with the chance to contribute personal input into their own learning, empowering them to develop in the direction they wish to take. Ultimately, the student learns in a collaborative style by integrating self, theory and practice to develop skills and a knowledge base necessary to practice in today's social climate.

Helenmary

A social work education at ECU is an exciting opportunity to be part of a young, innovative, collaborative social work school. Bunbury campus provides a very personalised environment for learning. It is staffed by people who are committed to an excellence in social work training, at the same time ensuring students are respected and valued. The curriculum provides an opportunity for each student to gain an overall view of the complexities and diversity that a career in social work offers with a special focus on regional and rural practice.

Allyson

A social work education at ECU is enjoyable and very rewarding yet challenging as we are being prepared to enter a profession that strives to raise awareness of numerous inequalities that exist, yet are ignored. We are prompted to examine ourselves and our position in a world that ignores and perpetuates these qualities, however, we could be considered lucky in that we are doing so in an environment which nurtures change. The education we receive at ECU allows us to address issues in our lives which may challenge our notions of the world in which we live, yet assists us to integrate our new-found knowledge and awareness in a way in which benefits both ourselves and our future clients.

Fieldwork

We are just finishing Edith Cowan's University's first field placement. So much learning for all of us involved. Wonderful regional and rural placements we were able to utilise because the University made a firm commitment to financing student travel and accommodation costs on placements. We have made a strong commitment to supporting field placements through training, and extensive liaison visits. Regional and rural practice has become real within the context of field practice.

Helenmary

Doing field placement in a regional area is all about being exposed to the pluses and minuses that exist for people living within that region. Regional areas are very unique. They have a history and culture quite distinct from metropolitan areas and a lifestyle that is often more personalised. Doing a field placement in a regional area enables the student to become familiar with the whole environment, the impacts upon the people living there. This heightened awareness gives rise to being able to provide a greater quality service.

Allyson

Doing field placement in a regional area is not only about gaining an awareness of issues that impinge upon certain groups in our society, it is also about gaining a heightened awareness of specific issues that impinge upon all individuals living in a regional community, obtaining this heightened awareness can only benefit my practice as I intend to do just that in a regional centre. However, this knowledge can also be translated to issues that affect individuals living in the metropolitan areas, further enhancing my knowledge of social work's values and fundamental beliefs.

Lina

Doing field placement in a regional area is all about - learning, experiencing and appreciating the rural or regional locality. At the same time becoming aware of the inherent issues unique to each area and the difference in the type of service provision that caters for these regions.

Ashley

Doing a social work field placement in a regional area is quite a new experience for me, and very different to working in the human service field in a metropolitan setting. I was fortunate enough to be able to spend the first week of placement networking with other agencies within the local region and getting to put faces to names. Although I was not aware of the immense value of this exercise at first, I soon realised that in a rural area the sense of community is still very strong because everyone seems to know everyone. It is quite common to see other workers as well as clients in a social setting which at times can be difficult. Boundaries around appropriate forums to discuss issues requiring confidentiality can sometimes be blurred which may prove extremely dangerous, both to clients and workers alike. The differences between rural and metropolitan social work practice need to be experienced first hand in order to fully appreciate the complexities that emerge in a regional setting.

Vera

Doing a field placement in a regional area is all about who knows whom or how one can get to know whom. It's about linking and thinking resourcing and not sinking. It's about privacy, confidentiality and stopping those that know too much from spreading the word. It is about counselling and being counselled to be a better counsellor and hoping the guinea pigs survive in the mean time. It is about fact finding, perception, asking and unmasking, or, as a student, maybe about creating the professional mask, the illusion that says I know what I am doing, but most of all it is about the pursuit of personal growth and knowledge that will create the social worker we all want to be so much.

Gayle

Doing field placement in a regional area is all about *values* such as confidentiality, because someone will know who you are talking about, client privacy, information sharing, cooperation, collaboration, peer support, networking and keeping communication going in the face of contested arenas.

Skills such as familiarisation with agency and agency context, building relationships, questioning and being questioned, critically analysing, articulating thoughts, keeping communication open and honest, and drinking lots of coffee.

Knowledge such as identifying structural impacts on self, agency and political arenas, integrating theory to practice, identifying power imbalances and being aware of as well as struggling with the many ethical dilemmas that present themselves.

Briony

Doing a field placement in a regional area is about practising good social work skills with an awareness of the additional regional or remote factors which impact on the people in these areas. Regional areas are subject to particular and unique problems which rarely arise in metropolitan areas. Issues such as rural youth suicide, isolation, limited services and difficulty maintaining confidentiality are just a few of the complex issues a social work student is likely to encounter on a regional field placement.

Rick

Doing field placement in a regional area is all about adjusting to change. Many students doing their placement in a non-regional area find themselves working in an unfamiliar setting (agency or office). Students doing a regional placement besides finding themselves in an unfamiliar setting also find themselves in an unfamiliar area. There is the pressure of finding accommodation, being apart from family and friends, and in some cases having to live with new acquaintances. There are of course also benefits. There is the challenge of adjustment. The chance to explore another part of the state, or in some cases the country. There is also the fact that regional social work is different from metropolitan social work. Regional social workers don't have the benefit of the supports (emotional and material) that metropolitan workers have. Regional social workers, at times, are the only ones operating in the region. There are problems with communication, how can you be supervised effectively? New challenges arise from regional social work, challenges that ECU students are equipped to meet.

HEALTH REBATES FOR PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS

The AASW Victoria Branch is coordinating a national campaign to attain recognition by health insurance funds of services provided by social workers for rebate purposes.

In order to facilitate our submission we urgently require the following information from social workers in private practice:

- A list of specialised practitioners who would be interested in acquiring a health benefits provider number
- The average number of sessions required for treatment purposes
- The percentage of clients currently seen by private practitioners who subscribe to private health insurance funds
- Criteria used by practitioners to determine the number of client visits.

For further information, please contact

Dr Philip Mendes, Social Policy Officer, on (03) 9663 4866 or (03) 9663 3889