

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Association's Annual General Meeting will be held on Friday 7 November in Canberra. This will be followed by the Directors' meeting on 8 - 9 November.

It is somewhat disappointing that the Association reports a loss for the year 1996/97 of \$96,638. The audited accounts present this loss as an operating loss of \$37,302 and an abnormal item of \$59,336. The abnormal item is reported as the 50th Anniversary.

The previous financial year 95/96 produced an operating profit of \$115,566. It would seem that the deficit in 96/97 was actually due to a posting error on the income side. That is, an overestimation of income for that year that the Directors' were not made aware of until the audit. This deficit has led to a run down in share holders equity or retained profit. It has reduced from \$572,014 for 1995/96 to \$475,376 for 1996/97. It is also worth noting that for 1996/97 most branches returned more income than they expended, amounting overall to \$74,082. Of particular importance is the West Australian figure, an income of \$121,067 and an expenditure of \$87,889. That is a recorded profit for the year of \$33,178.

It would also seem that much of the confusion about 1996/97 has occurred because of the need for the audit to be done on a set of accounts based on the accrual system, whereas the periodic reporting to Directors has always been based on a cash accounting system related to a program budget.

It is critical that the Association now addresses this substantial trading deficit for the last financial year in an attempt to claw back its economic position. This is particularly important in view of its liabilities for the future. The operating lease commitment the Association faces in the next five years is some \$325,986.

The past month has also been characterised by some press about social work. The first was the front page article

in *The West Australian* based on a leaked document from staff of Family and Children's Services. The second was an article by a guest columnist Kevin Moran in the Sunday Times on 26 October.

It may be of interest to members to note that the Editor of *The West Australian* in response to my letter (copies of which are reproduced in the Letters section of this newsletter), has suggested I need "counselling" to alleviate an inherent bias I appear to have against the press. This letter also drew comment from the Acting Director General of Family and Children's Services and an invitation from Peter Kennedy to appear on his morning program on ABC radio 6WF. This was live to air on 22 October at 9.35. I also believe that there was some comment from listeners during the morning "Just A Minute" segment on the same program.

On a more positive note, is the response that Laurie Sutherland and the South West Group have received to their *Respect Campaign*. It was pleasing to see such a large number of politicians responding in such a committed fashion. Indeed, it is worth noting that Mike Board, Minister for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs, not only responded extremely promptly, but also signed off on his personal commitment.

This piece of social action, initiated by Laurie and the South West Group demonstrates how powerful organised lobbying can be in keeping issues like this to the fore and in developing an awareness of what is important. I would like to congratulate Laurie and the South West Group for their efforts on this issue. It has gathered considerable momentum over the last few months.

We need to remember that collective action is a very powerful weapon when addressing social issues.

BRIAN WOOLLER

Association for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy of Western Australia (APPWA)

PSYCHOTHERAPY TRAINING PROGRAMME

Applications are invited from interested professionals for a training programme in dynamic psychotherapy with adults, to begin in July 1998. This involves three years of didactic lectures and seminars on a part-time basis, with concurrent personal psychotherapy and clinical supervision.

APPWA is the Western Australian affiliate of the Psychotherapy Association of Australia - a federated body which works through a single accredited organisation in each state. Training programmes run by member organisations are approved and monitored by the federal body. Successful completion of this programme allows trainees to apply for membership of APPWA.

As a general rule, applicants will be clinical professionals with at least three years of post-graduate clinical experience. They will need to be working in a setting where they have access to long term therapy cases for supervision.

Initial enquiries and requests for application forms should be directed to:

Ms Carol Bolton on (08) 9336 2937 or Dr Noel Howieson on (08) 9387 8930.

**Closing date for applications is
31 January 1998**

ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE SUBCOMMITTEE

The WA Branch is establishing a Professional Practice Subcommittee and interested members are invited to call Virginia Scott on 9450 2833. Further information will be available in the December issue of the *West Australian Social Worker*.

New Members

Patricia Armstrong (Student Associate)
Dawn Bessarab (Family and Children's Services)
Kylie Booth (Student Associate)
Vera Christensen (Student Associate)
Rachel Davey (Student Associate)
Heath Flanagan (Student Associate)
Richard Goddard-Williams (Private Practice)
Lani Kaszanski (ARAFMI)
Fredri Kruger
Holly McAllister (Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital)
Rachael Nelthorpe
Christine Perriam (Fremantle Hospital)
Charles Rich (Student Associate)
Kersten Robinson (Student Associate)
George Smith (Aust Medical Practice Research Foundation)
Mavis Steenson (Student Associate)
Nicole Taylor (Lower Metro Health Service)
Dianne Thurston
Ivy Vukovich (Bentley Health Services)
Gavin West (Family and Children's Services)
Paul Whelligan (Student Associate)

Letters

***The Hon. J H Day MLA
Minister for Police Emergency Services***

Dear Mr Day

There has been some public discussion about the resources deployed to the Police Child Abuse Unit. Our Association has some concern regarding the decision of the Police Department in its allocation of resources to this Unit.

It is our understanding that there is currently a backlog of 300 cases and only Priority One work is carried out by the Police Child Abuse Unit. Other cases that are not allocated to Priority One are given to local stations to investigate.

The resources deployed to investigate child abuse allegations have always been meagre in the context of overall police resources. The backlog and speed of response has always had the potential to compromise the ability of social workers and Family and Children's Services staff to respond quickly to claims of child abuse made to them. There have been occasions when they have been unable to proceed for fear of compromising the evidence necessary for the police to commence with the prosecutions. This leaves young children vulnerable and the potential harm to them to continue for as long as the investigation is not brought to a conclusion.

Professional Supervision and Staff Development

Brenda Clare BA (Hons), MA, MSW, CQSW

I am now in private practice and a full-time research student at the University of Western Australia.

I have practice, supervision and management experience in work with children and families. I have expertise in family assessment, risk management, consultation and decision-making.

I am available for professional supervision with individual social workers and I am also offering consultation and training in these areas with agencies providing family-based services.

I can be contacted on 08 9291 7423

It is paramount that appropriate resourcing by trained staff occurs for the Police Child Abuse Unit to function to its maximum. This is one area of activity of police services which should not incur cutting to meet budgetary and economic restraints. It is particularly important, that you as Minister, ensure that the Police deploy enough resources to this sensitive and difficult area to maintain a quick response at all times.

Our Association hopes that you will be able to show responsibility in ensuring the Police Department apportion enough resources to investigate matters of child abuse.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
Branch President
3 October 1997

***The Hon. Richard Court MLA
Premier of Western Australia***

Dear Sir

I have written to you on a number of occasions regarding the proposed restructure of Family and Children's Services. My first letter to you was in December 1996. My first two letters were not acknowledged. My third received a simple acknowledgment of receipt.

I note in *The West Australian*, Wednesday 15 October 1997, that Family and Children's Services is currently being restructured. I have also received a copy of the structural re-arrangements that they are about to embark on. This restructure would appear to be an even larger one than occurred in 1985.

The restructure in 1985 was open to public scrutiny and involved the community in the process. It is disappointing that your government has secretly, without any public consultation and contrary to your promises for open and accountable government embarked on this serious major restructure. It is also significant that many social workers are at the moment under incredible stress due to both restructure and changing the way in which they do their work within Family and Children's Services.

It is disappointing that your office is unable to respond to reasonable questions put to it in a reasonable fashion and its secrecy regarding major restructures is less than helpful.

Open and accountable government requires that major stakeholders such as our organisation are informed of changes to the way in which work is done or the context within which that work is carried out. We are at all times agreeable to being involved in that process and would suggest we have something to offer by way of useful suggestion and support for change processes.

From the silence coming out of your office and the *fait accompli* we are now faced with, we can only assume that some deep political or organisational motive underpins these changes rather than a desire to either improve services or make what is a very stressful job that social workers are required to do in departments such as Family and Children's Services, even more difficult.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
AASW (WA Branch) President
c.c.Hon. Hendy Cowan, Deputy Premier
Hon. Dr Geoff Gallop, Leader of the Opposition
15 October 1997

***The Editor
West Australian Newspaper***

Dear Editor

Your headline of the 15 October 1997 referring to a leaked internal memo to the Director General of Family and Children's Services, again highlights your newspaper's focus on sensation rather than substance.

Working in children's protection is one of the hardest and most stressful areas for a social worker. Often with a shortage of resources, problematic family relationships, the pressure to act quickly and with conflicting and confusing policies, workers are expected to at all times make decisions that are seen by everybody as fair, equitable and appropriate.

Social workers in Family and Children's Services are under-

going major change both in relation to the way in which they respond to children's protection complaints and in the structure of the organisation within which they provide these services. Workers are being expected to absorb major changes to practice and organisational structure. These additional stresses, added to a most difficult job, with increasing scrutiny produces daily stress with few rewards.

To link a child death with the adequacy or inadequacy of services, at a point prior to the outcome of any coronial inquiry, is grossly unfair and unjust to workers involved in this case. Our Association is not aware that there has been an official finding in relation to this child death, but we are aware that the Department is undertaking some form of inquiry.

It would be nice to see these workers supported in their endeavours and not criticised for any perceived wrong doing, error or omission and judged by either the press or any other form of kangaroo court. Before coming to any conclusion, look at the facts and the context in which events occur.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
AASW (WA Branch) President
15 October 1997

Mr Brian Wooller
AASW (WA Branch) President

Dear Mr Wooller

Thank you for your letter of October 15.

It highlights once again your inability to grasp the reality of public issues. Consequently, your effectiveness as a lobbyist is seriously diminished.

The matter about which you write was brought to us by social workers. The same social workers were worried about being blamed for the death. The whole report revolved around their complaints of overwork and under-resourcing.

We did not link the death and the complaints. Those who leaked the memo to us did that. There was no criticism of the workers either inherent or explicit in the report.

I suggest you have an inherent bias against the press which could probably be alleviated through counselling. I would suggest one of WA's excellent social workers who receive regular support through reports in *The West Australian*.

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

Yours faithfully

Paul Murray
Editor
The West Australian
20 October 1997

Mr Brian Wooller
Branch President

Dear Brian

I would like to commend your support of social workers in your letter to *The West Australian* on 18 October 1997.

However, I was disappointed at some of the terminology used in your letter which I believe indirectly and unnecessarily criticised this department. Your reference to conflicting and confusing policies, followed by reference to this department's big changes in the way it responds to child protection complaints seems to suggest that the department is not yet clear on this direction. If there still is any confusion in regards to this department's new directions in child protection and family support, I would be very keen to provide further explanation and clarification.

Your final reference to the "kangaroo court" also could leave a negative impression if read as applying to this organisation.

Please be assured as always that this department is strongly committed to supporting its staff and is very mindful of the stressful and dangerous situations to which they are exposed on a regular basis.

Yours sincerely

Gary Bowler

A/Director General
Family and Children's Services
21 October 1997

RECENT GRADUATES PICNIC

The Recent Graduates Committee of the AASW (WA Branch) would like to invite fellow recent graduates to a picnic to celebrate the end of our first year as social workers!

Sunday 23 November 1997, 2 pm
Matilda Bay
(near the Tea Rooms)

For further information please contact Petrina
Butcher (08) 9271 5583