

President's Report

September sees the WA Branch Annual Conference. This year with Zita Antonios as the keynote speaker, it is most appropriate in terms of issues currently facing our profession. Again, the conference is well subscribed and promises to be the usual important event it has over the years proven to be.

Our profession has once again been receiving negative headlines in *The West Australian* and some letters to the Editor, notable among them Kevin Moran, former Police Superintendent. It is impossible for us to shake off the “do-gooder” tag, and as I have said on many occasions, I do prefer to be tagged a “do-gooder” rather than a “do-badder”.

In an era of increasing social dislocation and accountability for practice, we are likely to be subjected to negative comment expressed through the media. We need to develop a degree of resilience, be confident in our practice and be prepared to meet the scrutiny of the community. We need to stand up and be counted, be proud of what we do, and be prepared to defend our actions for as long as they are ethical, professional and appropriate.

Times do change and so do social mores and the context within which we practice. We need to be mindful not only of the current context, the current accepted standards, but also of the longer term. Much of what we do now may from a point of view of humanity be seen to be inappropriate with the hindsight of history.

We must at all times remember the things that have been done in name of policy are often retrospectively seen to be manifestly wrong as has been clearly demonstrated in the Human Rights Commission Report on the Stolen Generation, in the reports on the dislocation and concerns in relation to adoption, with the long term misery of the migrant children placed in Australia, and the general disenfranchisement of indigenous people over many years.

Policies of child welfare, criminal justice, economic rationalism, downsizing, outsourcing, tendering, privatisation, will always have longer term negative effects as a consequences of both the intended and unintended kind emerge. What ought to put social work apart as a profession is an ability to see policies in the context of the human outcomes and we should at all times be guided by those principles that were enunciated some time ago by

our professional forebears. The principles and values governing our profession are steeped in what was essentially a humanistic tradition and are more likely to stand the test of than emergent policies of the time and day to day expediency.

In closing, as a Branch we have had a very successful year to date with our continuing professional education programs. They have been both stimulating and well attended. The Continuing Professional Education Committee under the stewardship of Anne Pickard and with the assistance of Liz Retamal as their project officer have done sterling work. It would be useful if members could also contribute their thoughts about what might be useful things for us to do of a continuing professional development kind. Any suggestions, I am sure, would be gratefully received and certainly acted upon.

BRIAN WOOLLER

Professional Practice Committee

Some time ago, the importance of having a focal point and working group to address a wide range of professional practice issues facing the profession, also major projects such as the development of practice standards and review of the Code of Ethics (together with the Branch Ethics Committee) was recognised by the Committee of Management and a decision was made to re-establish the Professional Practice Committee.

The Committee of five members, comprising Brian Dodds, Maribelle Thomas, Pattie Benjamin, Dawn Mielens and Virginia Scott (Convenor), met and developed a statement of vision, aims and terms of reference which were subsequently endorsed by the Committee of Management.

Vision

The vision for the committee, “Expanding the horizons of social work”, recognises the key role social work can play in the community and the challenge for social work to contribute from its comprehensive knowledge and skills base to the many and complex social and ethical issues which are arising.

Aims

The Committee aims to provide leadership and a point of reference for social workers, employing agencies and clients on matters of social work practice; promote practice wisdom; provide a context and forum for identifying, defining and debating issues of professional practice; and encourage the ongoing development of the profession and its practitioners in order to demonstrate and maintain excellence and service to the community.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference reflect a number of ways in which these aims might be achieved, a key one being to encourage the involvement and input of Branch members in professional practice matters. Others are:

- to identify professional practice issues relevant to and of concern to Branch members;
- to provide input to Branch matters relating to professional practice;
- to provide advice to the Committee of Management and individual members on professional practice matters;
- to contribute to Branch promotion of the profession;
- to promote, develop and contribute to professional practice policy and guidelines;
- to liaise and work with the National Professional Practice Committee;
- to liaise and work with the Branch Education Vice President and Education Committee in promoting and providing profes-

sional practice education and development activities;

- to liaise and work with the Standing Conference of Senior Social Workers and other relevant forums on the promotion and development of social work and professional practice matters;
- to undertake projects dealing with matters of professional practice;
- to encourage the involvement and input of Branch members in professional practice matters; and
- to liaise with and provide advice to the Schools of Social Work, in consultation with the Committee of Management, on professional practice matters and curriculum.

Work Program

The Committee also developed a work program for the year and has commenced this by participating in a joint workshop with the Branch Ethics Committee on the Social Work Recording Standards. Details of the program are outlined below.

The framework for the committee has therefore been established and a busy and challenging year is anticipated for 1998-1999. The committee would welcome expressions of interest from members in being involved in the various projects and also suggestions about other aspects of professional practice which they consider might or should be addressed.

VIRGINIA SCOTT

VICE PRESIDENT (ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE)

CONVENOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE COMMITTEE

Professional Practice Subcommittee Draft Work Program 1998-1999

Project: SW Recording Standards

Activity: Prepare project proposal (by end April 1998)

Review material from National office (end April 1998)

Prepare draft practice standards outcome format, linked with SW competencies (Commence May 1998)

Project: Report writing

Activity: Prepare project proposal (July 1998)

Draft outline of guidelines (by end 1998)

Project: Review of Code of Ethics

Activity: Review material on reference list (National Office time line not known)

Other activities as per National Office project plan (National Office time line not known)

Project: Support for social workers working with crisis and trauma situations

Activity: Prepare notes from initial meeting (July 1998)

Prepare project outline (August 1998)

Project: Support initiatives for regional and isolated social workers

Activity: Conduct brainstorming session, possibly by teleconference (July 1998)

Project: Social workers as witnesses I court proceedings

Activity: Circulate papers to subcommittee (July 1998)

Prepare project proposal, to include information; guidelines; education; organisational support (August 1998)

Project: Organisational policies, procedures and structure as a support for ethical professional practice

Activity: Prepare project proposal negotiate with agency (July August 1998)

Negotiate with agency (September October 1998)

Project: List of available social work supervisors

Activity: Prepare statement of objectives, protocol and guidelines. Seek National Office legal advice (October November 1998)

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN WA

Last year a group of people, worried at what they considered a wide ranging erosion of citizens' civil liberties came together to form a Western Australian civil liberties action group along the lines of similar ones interstate. This became known as People for Justice. It has been recognised and supported by many senior legal and other professional people including a significant number of AASW members. It also comprises many concerned community members of the public.

People for Justice is unrelated to any other civil liberties group in this state, and is in the process of being affiliated with all the other civil liberties groups in Australia as the recognised West Australian organisation.

Concern about the media reporting of the recent Justice Wallwork case, and about the reporting of crime, particularly that of youth, People for Justice is holding a seminar on *Issues in the Media Representation of Criminal Justice on September 24th 1998. The seminar will be held in the Social Sciences lecture theatre at UWA, at 7.30.*

There will be no charge. The event is being sponsored by the School of Social Work and Social Administration, and we are grateful to Jim Ife and the School for their support.

Because it is important to act swiftly when civil liberties issues present, the speakers are not yet confirmed. However, four of the main protagonists in the case will appear in a panel to be chaired by distinguished journalist Vicki Laurie, who has written a major article on the subject for the Bulletin.

AASW members are urged to attend, as both civil liberties and issues of law and order are central one way or another, to the practice of most of us, and indeed to our day to day lives. CPE points are available (1 point per hour of the session). For further information, please phone/fax Pattie Benjamin on (08) 9381 9496.

Incomes and Outcomes 5th Edition

The West Australian Branch of the AASW is pleased to announce that the 5th edition of Incomes and Outcomes is in its final printing stage and will be due for release in the first week of September.

The guide will be \$7.95 retail and \$6.00 for bul orders (10 minimum). These figures do not include postage and handling costs.

For further inquiries or orders, during business hours, contact Liz Retamal on 9443 2934.

Call for Nominations Centenary Women's Suffrage

1999 is the centenary of women's suffrage in Western Australia. The Centenary of Women's Suffrage Committee of the Women's Policy Development Office is developing a roll of honour and nominations close on 30th October 1998.

The Branch Committee of Management is canvassing for information of any social workers past or present who may be suitable to add to the list of nominations. Please forward names and details to Liz Retamal, AASW PO Box 198 West Perth 6872, Fax: (08) 9444.5410 or email: aaswwa@aasw.asn.au.

Letters

Mr Brian Wooller
WA Branch President

Dear Mr Wooller

Thank you for your letter of 14 May 1998 expressing concern about the future of the Mental Health Outreach Project sponsored by Women's Health Care House.

I do appreciate the difficulty under which the project has been operating this year in the face of uncertainty about the future of the Commonwealth National Mental Health funding.

It has now been confirmed that Commonwealth funds will continue next year. This will be at a somewhat reduced rate and budget restraint will be necessary, however essential services will not be compromised.

Thank you for your indication of support for this program.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Prince LL.B MLA
Minister for Health
5 June 1998

Mr Brian Wooller
WA Branch President

Dear Brian

This is to let you know that National Mental Health Programme funding has been made available by the state Minister for Health, to ensure that affected mental health services are able to continue operating for 1998-99.

The decision to release the funds followed a campaign by services and their clients to impress upon the government the implications of letting funding run out. Your support for the campaign, and for this service in particular, is greatly appreciated. It is good to know that community-level action can be effective in changing government policy, if not attitudes.

Once again, thank you for your support in this important and successful campaign.

Regards

Lorraine Johnston
Coordinator Mental Health Project
8 June 1998

The Editor
The West Australian

Dear Editor

Kevin Moran in his letter *Social workers are a destructive force* (20th August 1998), once again demonstrates his considerable vitriol against social workers, suggesting that they have unfettered powers.

Unfortunately, Mr Moran, as you would well know, social workers are just as fallible in their area of work as policemen are in theirs. It is groups like these that are often asked to do the impossible under impossible circumstances and rather than unfettered powers need uncanny abilities. I suggest you turn your attention to problems in areas you may have some knowledge of, such as high speed chases, clear up rates for reported crime and slow response rates to police call out.

You seem to want to extend your manifest concern about the state of the world to blaming social workers. It is a shame that your world view and analysis is so limited and tainted by an obvious personal bias.

Constructive criticism and more thought might be a productive approach for you to take.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
Branch President
20 August 1998

New Members

- Jean Annison (Lower Great Southern Community Mental Health Service)
- Noella Berko (Student Associate)
- Barbara Black (Student Associate)
- Karen Bradbrook (Family and Children's Services)
- Gayle Corbould (Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital)
- Gabrielle Egan
- Naomi Ling (Perth Home Care Services)
- Jennifer Monson
- Leigh Sochacki

WESTERN AUSTRALIANS LIVING IN HARMONY

The WA Branch of the AASW has signed the Charter of Western Australians Living in Harmony.

The content of the charter reads:

This to certify, that the Australian Association of Social Workers (WA Branch) is committed to the following principles:

- *a positive, harmonious and just community;*
- *the freedom of all to maintain and share their cultural heritage and the reciprocal responsibility of all to accept the rights of others to do so; and*
- *the need to utilise the skills and talents of all individuals so as to maximise the social and economic benefits of cultural diversity.*

We affirm that positive community relations benefit all Western Australians and that we should all work towards community harmony.

The Charter will be displayed in the Branch Office.

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