



SPEECH BY JUDGE VALERIE FRENCH AT SOCIAL WORK AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

The following is the text of the speech presented by Judge Valerie French, President Children s Court of Western Australia, at the Social Work Awards for Excellence held 17 May 2000.

It gives me great pleasure to address you on the occasion of the Social Work Awards for Excellence presentation evening.

While not natural enemies, lawyers and social workers regard each other rather like Gladiators in the Colosseum. We may be fighting the same enemy on some occasions but with different weapons and may even turn on each other if the situation turns nasty. To carry the metaphor further we may even consider it appropriate to throw one and other to the lions if things are really desperate.

No matter what our individual experience may be there is a discernible tension between the two professions. This is no doubt exacerbated by elements of professional chauvinism. Social workers may regard lawyers as reductionists working in a justice system that by definition is constrained by narrow rules and regulations. Lawyers regard social workers who operate in broader areas of social justice and welfare as hopelessly holistic.

Of course if you read the letters in the daily press or have the misfortune to listen to some talk back radio, we are all lumped together as useless do gooders who are conspiring together to bring about the end of civilisation as we know it. Despite all of these reservations, lawyers and social workers work side by side in most areas of the justice system, including the criminal justice system, the Family Courts and Child Protection Courts. Of all these areas of common endeavour it is the Children s Court that is the one

at the cutting edge of the interface between the legal system and social justice and welfare areas.

The history of the development of juvenile justice and the Children s Court of Western Australia illustrates a range of policies that reflect a changing balance between the two systems. When a separate Children s Court was established in 1907 it combined the functions of a juvenile criminal court for minor offences, a summary court for the relief of deserted wives and children and a general welfare agency. Despite this coalition of justice and welfare the juvenile justice system at that time would be judged by today s standards as a harsh model with a heavy emphasis on punishment.

In a delightful account of the state of the Children s Court in two decades from 1909 to 1929 the Honourable A Lovekin MLC presiding as an honorary special Magistrate described the use of corporal punishment in the following terms:

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I was shown a heavy strap with a large buckle attached to it, used, when occasion called for it, to impose the six, ten or twelve strokes which the Court might have ordered infliction upon the unfortunate delinquents who came before it.

From the late 1920s through to the 1980s the Children's Court was operated on what is called the Welfare model. The Court was administered by the then Department of Community Services (now Family and Children's Services) and offending was seen as a reflection of more serious welfare concerns, such as homelessness and child abuse.

In 1982 Professor Eric Edwards from the University of Western Australia Law School completed a report on the juvenile justice system. Despite the fact that this report was originally commissioned to investigate community perceptions of systemic leniency, the report provided a completely different analysis. Professor Edwards concluded that while the welfare model was motivated by concern for children's protection, it had the unfortunate consequence of disregarding their legal rights. It resulted in many young offenders being in detention for longer periods and for less serious offences than equivalent adult offenders.

Professor Edwards recommended a juvenile justice system run on a Justice model with appropriate legislative changes, new court structures and a transfer of administration to the Justice Ministry as with the adult courts.

It is now just over ten years since these reforms have been implemented. The Children's Court as presently constituted was established in 1989. It is a court able to deal with all criminal offences committed by offenders under the age of 18 years and is presided over by a Judge and run on criminal justice principles. The care and protection jurisdiction dealing with applications for abused or neglected children to be placed under the care and control of the Department of Family and Children's Services is entirely separate.

Juvenile offenders are dealt with under the principles of juvenile justice, espoused in the *Young Offenders Act*, with rehabilitation the paramount consideration and detention to be used only as a last resort. Although welfare issues are the focus of the rehabilitation programs the structure of the Court and the legislation ensures that young offenders are

not indirectly punished because of their welfare problems.

Despite the fact that his recommendations have now been implemented, I am sure that Professor Edwards would be saddened by the fact that our juvenile imprisonment rate is still the highest in Australia with a disgraceful percentage of young Aboriginal inmates. The sad reality is that although you can in theory separate out justice and welfare issues you can't escape the fact a large proportion of the offending is born out of welfare problems, either directly or indirectly. Many of the names in our filing section under our Care and Protection jurisdiction appear a few years later in our criminal records. It is a stark reminder that our juvenile villains are often the flip side of the victim coin.

With the drastic closure of many juvenile welfare institutions in the 1980s the shortage of accommodation and supervision is a daily obstacle in allowing many offenders to remain in the community. While that may seem as

punishing welfare problems the fact is that a young person without a stable home and supervision is rarely a promising candidate for rehabilitation. The current situation with juvenile justice in Western Australia is in sharp contrast with the position in Victoria. Although the Children's Court in Victoria only deals with young offenders under

the age of 17 years, the Court appears to spend most of its time dealing with the Care and Protection jurisdiction, rather than the criminal jurisdiction.

When I visited the new Victorian Children's Court recently, I was amazed to find that the Care and Protection Courts that are situated, physically in one side of the building were a hive of activity with waiting rooms full of parents, kids and many lawyers. On the particular day I was there the one or two trials that were listed had fallen through and a whole side of the Court building that is devoted to the criminal jurisdiction was virtually deserted.

I am not sure whether Victoria has been through a welfare versus justice model cycle and is now in a welfare cycle, or whether Western Australia is further along in the continuum for once. It was interesting to note that in the Care and Protection Courts that I observed there seemed to be many young adolescents whose delinquency problems were being dealt with in the Care and Protection jurisdiction rather than in the context of criminal offending. It is difficult

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to make any comparative assessment between the two systems as Western Australia has quite different geographical problems and a comparatively high number of juvenile Aboriginal offenders.

In addition there appears to be a practice in Victoria that many young persons are held or rather housed in what is termed protective custody, whereas those kinds of alternative facilities are not available in Western Australia. I also understand that the numbers of young persons in such facilities are not included in the Victorian juvenile crime statistics as young persons in detention or imprisonment.

The history of juvenile justice in this State and the difficult problem of trying to achieve an appropriate balance between justice and the welfare considerations suggests that there will be changes or swings in the policy emphasis between justice and welfare in the future. Although it sometimes seems to be that the more things change, the more they stay the same, these fluctuations can be positive and may eventually distil a more appropriate balance.

There will always be a tension between the justice and welfare considerations for the criminal justice system. A tension between imposing a sentence that reflects the seriousness of the offending behaviour and its consequences for the community and the importance of promoting the rehabilitation of a young offender who is the product of an impoverished or abused childhood. It is also the case that social workers and the Courts approach this tension from a different perspective.

The Courts must recognise the strength of public opinion and the need to protect the safety of the community. If not then the discretion exercised by the Courts will simply be taken out of their hands as is so amply demonstrated by the current regime of mandatory sentencing. A more frightening prospect of any lack of confidence in the role of the criminal justice system and the role of law is the emergence of vigilante type actions and sentiments expressed by various sections of the community from time to time.

It is of course obvious that if the welfare considerations are ignored it will be at the community's peril as this may produce more alienated and embittered young offenders.

This dilemma is what presents the greatest challenges for social workers who work in the criminal justice system or in related areas. Of course social workers have a much broader role in the community in dealing with offenders, past, present and future through community based programs, diversion options and early intervention in welfare issues to prevent offending. But to have a more effective interaction with the criminal justice system, it is important that they

understand fully the constraints within which courts can operate.

It sometimes seems that there is a kind of communication gap between the two systems. This is often apparent in the approach that is often adopted in the juvenile justice reports that are provided to the Children's Court. In many cases it appears that the officers that prepare the reports seem rather confused about the role that the reports will play in the sentencing process.

As a result of that it is my experience that the reports often lack credibility and are less than frank because they attempted to gloss over what the authors see as negative matters in relation to juvenile offenders. The difficulty is that if the Courts cannot have confidence in the reports providing a frank and accurate appraisal of a juvenile offender's circumstances, then they will not be able to have confidence in the content of the report and the reports will cease to be of much assistance to a sentencing court.

It is also the case that the justice system needs to understand and respect the role that social workers play in the system. There is obviously a need for continuing relationship between the respective groups and systems. This is particularly so in the difficult times that the criminal justice system and the welfare system face today. Times of scarce resources, the often antagonistic face of public opinion and the increasing demands of what many of us regard as a harsher and more alienated social climate. The relationship needs to be one of understanding and respect and also of trust.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ATTEND THE STATE CONFERENCE FREE?

Deadline for applications has been extended to 14 August 2000!

If you would like to attend this year's State Conference and you are a remote practitioner, the AASW (WA Branch) might have an offer you can't refuse. As part of its support to remote practitioners to help them comply with the Association's CPE requirements, the Branch will support a member of the AASW who is a remote practitioner to attend this year's State Conference.

The conference will be held in Perth 5-7 September 2000 and Bunbury 8-9 September 2000. As you would have seen in the program, this year's conference promises to be a very important and worthwhile event. In order to be considered, an applicant must be:

- ♦ a member of the WA Branch of the AASW;
- ♦ work in a remote setting; and

- ♦ would otherwise be unable to attend the conference.


Applicants who wish to be considered should provide a short submission to the selection committee of no longer than 2 pages outlining how attendance at the conference would benefit themselves, their clients and their agency. It should also include a strategy of how they would disseminate the information acquired at the conference to their region or community when they return from the conference.

The person selected will have their conference registration paid including the conference dinner and receive a return economy class airfare to Perth. The person will be billeted with an AASW member in Perth during their stay. Transport to and from the airport and assistance to get to the conference venue will be provided.

Note: The State Conference, as an AASW sponsored activity, accrues double CPE points. Submissions should be sent to:

**Executive Officer
AASW (WA Branch)
PO Box 198 West Perth 6872
or Fax to (08) 9444 5410**

**no later than
Monday, 14th August 2000**




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POSITION AVAILABLE - SOCIAL POLICY OFFICER

Applications are invited for the part time position of Social Policy Officer for the WA Branch of the AASW.

The position has been funded for one year as a pilot and will be reviewed near the end of that period.

Main Duties

- ♦ Gather and analyse information regarding social policy issues and practice.
- ♦ Prepare written reports, position/discussion papers and recommendations regarding social policy matters.
- ♦ Prepare social policy statements intended for release to the media.
- ♦ Provide support to the Branch's social policy subcommittees.

This half time position will be responsible to the Branch President, but supervised on a day to day basis by the Vice President, Social Policy.

Selection Criteria

- 1) Well developed knowledge and understanding of social policy issues.
- 2) Well developed conceptual and analytical abilities.
- 3) High level of written and interpersonal communication skills.

- 4) Good organisational, planning and time management skills.
- 5) The ability to work with minimal supervision.
- 6) Ability to rapidly gather and assimilate information on specific topics and draft letters, reports, discussion/position papers or media releases.
- 7) Thorough knowledge and understanding of the AASW Code of Ethics.
- 8) Social work qualification with eligibility for full membership of the AASW.
- 9) Accredited Social Work member of the AASW.

General Information

Salary - \$20,000/annum

Position will operate 20 hours per week.

For more information contact Chris Coopes - ph 9432 3564, mobile 040 489 0129. Applications close Thursday 31 August 2000 at 5 pm. Written application addressing the selection criteria should be submitted to:

Chris Coopes, Vice President (Social Policy), AASW (WA Branch), PO Box 198, West Perth, 6872

For a copy of the position statement contact Liz Retamal ☎ 9420 7240.

Net Watch

One of the benefits from the Web is being able to access a vast and rich store of material about contemporary matters. Reviews can be a valuable method of identifying and clarifying the issues and quality of new movies that appear in our local cinema.

The Web can often be an excellent starting point for obtaining a wider spectrum of views and opinion about a movie. There are many sites which provide movie reviews, though some of these can have an American centric focus. A good source of movie reviews can be found at: <http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/>, which seems to remember that films are distributed and watched throughout the world, not just in the United States.

*Sometimes local reviewers do not adequately address all aspects of a movie and may treat difficult issues in a parochial manner. These shortcomings can occur particularly when a movie deals with a highly contentious topic. An example is the movie **War Zone**, which has recently been released in Perth. The film review by James Berardinelli about this film has been reproduced as it gives an excellent outline of this recommended film. The full text is available from http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/w/war_zone.html.*

THE WAR ZONE

*Note: This review contains spoilers. While I do not believe the revelation of certain plot points will in any way compromise the viewing experience, those who wish to see **The War Zone** without having previous knowledge of a key element would do well to bail out now and return after they have seen the film.*

The title of **The War Zone** conjures up images of devastation and disaster, of broken lives and rotting corpses. And, while this stunningly accomplished feature debut from Tim Roth has nothing to do with traditional battlefields, it is every bit as harrowing as the first 30 minutes of **Saving Private Ryan** or the whole of **Schindler's List**. The destruction presented in this film is as graphic and shocking as anything depicted in the most unsparring war movie, except that the victims are not soldiers trained for combat, but children placed in harm's way.

Incest isn't just a "nasty little secret" or a "family issue." It is an abuse of power and a violation of trust. Even when the sex is ostensibly consensual, it is rape. Perhaps the most

unnerving thing about incest is how often it happens and how many silent victims there are. Statistics are meaningless with this kind of molestation - shame keeps a majority of those affected quiet, so there's no way to get an accurate count. Yet experts agree that it is a prevalent cancer that infects families of every racial and social background. Gather a hundred random people together, and there are virtually guaranteed to be victims (and perhaps abusers as well) in their midst.

Seat those same hundred people in a theatre showing **The War Zone**, and the visceral reactions of the victims will betray them. At a public screening of this movie during the 1999 Toronto International Film Festival, one viewer was so upset that, in the midst of a crucial scene, he rose to his feet and shouted that he couldn't take any more, then headed for the exit, intending to pull the fire alarm. Roth, who was in attendance, intercepted him at the door, and it took 20 minutes of intense conversation to calm the man down.

The War Zone is a devastating motion picture; it's the kind of movie that stuns an audience so absolutely that they remain paralysed in their seats through the end credits. It does not deal in euphemisms nor does it hide the physical and emotional brutality of the act from viewers. What Roth has accomplished is nothing short of brilliant, but it is also incredibly daring, because the film has no commercial prospects. No matter how many critics trumpet **The War Zone's** merits, viewers will not flock to see it; the subject matter is too upsetting and daunting. Yet for sheer force of emotional power, I have not seen the movie's like in years. As I write this review two weeks after seeing **The War Zone**, every scene remains fresh in my mind, and the overall impact has not lessened.

The film takes place in the rural Devon countryside, where a family of four has just moved from London. Events are related from the perspective of 15 year-old Tom (Freddie Cunliffe), who is unhappy with life away from the city. His 18 year-old sister, Jessie (Lara Belmont), has apparently adjusted better than he has. His parents (Ray Winstone, Tilda Swinton) seem happy and comfortable in their new home, and his mother is on the verge of delivering her third child.

Then, shortly after the baby is born, Tom's world is turned upside down when he spies a covert sexual encounter between Jessie and his father. Tom confronts Jessie about the incident, but she denies it, accusing him of having an

overactive imagination. He is not convinced, however, and sets out to learn the facts. The truth he must face, and its ramifications upon every member of the family, form *The War Zone's* core drama.

In his handling of the material, Roth shows more ability than many accomplished, veteran filmmakers. He paints Devon as a grim, rainy place where darkness and greyness are always encroaching upon the light. Roth deals with the story in a way that does not insult the viewer's intelligence. There is much ambiguity to be found here. While one key rape is graphically depicted, the depth of the father's depravity and the question of how much the mother knows are left up to the individual to determine.

Roth freely admits that, with *The War Zone*, he has pushed the envelope as far as it can go - had he attempted more, the movie would have become too painful for anyone to watch. Even in its current form, it is a difficult, although rewarding, experience for those who make the effort. There is no comic relief and no happy ending (although there is a catharsis of sorts). Perhaps Jessie puts it best when she says, "You want everything to be nice and sweet, but it isn't." Comparisons with Francois Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and Lasse Hallstrom's *My Life As a Dog* (two films that Roth says inspired his approach to *The War Zone*) are entirely reasonable.

While Roth's adept direction and Alexander Stuart's screenplay are integral to the film's success, the consistently high level of acting is of paramount importance. Roth has assembled an amazing quartet of actors, two of whom have not had previous screen experience. Newcomer Freddie Cunliffe plays the silent, stone-faced, and uncommunicative Tom. Cunliffe effectively captures the teenager's growing horror and anger as he learns the truth about the relationship between his father and sister. It would have been easy for Cunliffe to go over-the-top, but he keeps everything low-key, and therein lies the power of his performance.

As Jessie, Lara Belmont is extraordinary. Her portrayal of the tormented, conflicted girl astonishes with its raw power. Stripped naked for the cameras (both emotionally and physically), the young actress gets everything right, from the heartbreaking pain evident during the rape scene to the subtle nuances of her interaction with the other characters. Her ability is most evident during the scene when Tom confronts their father - as a disconsolate, uncontrollably sobbing Jessie sits at the kitchen table, Belmont brings character's torment to the audience with full force. Not since Emily Watson in *Breaking the Waves* has an actresses' work affected me this deeply.



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of
Social Workers (WA Branch)
State Conference**

Best wishes to all delegates

The two veterans in the cast are Ray Winstone and Tilda Swinton. Winstone is no stranger to this sort of role - he played something similar in *Nil By Mouth* (another difficult-but-powerful British film). The strength of Winstone's performance is that he makes his character into a far more complex individual than the typical child abuser. With the exception of the rape scene, he is shown to be a loving, caring father and husband. Only once does the monster come into the open. Swinton is equally effective as the mother, who is apparently oblivious to the true nature of her husband's relationship with their daughter. The actress played this part immediately after giving birth to twins, and shows great dedication to her craft for displaying her nude body in its post-birth form.

Over the years, few movies have taken this sort of forthright look at incest. Often, even in the best of films (like Atom Egoyan's masterful *The Sweet Hereafter*), it is relegated to a subplot or the impact is diluted to make the picture more palatable. Stories about incest are actually presented with some frequency in network TV shows and made-for-TV movies, but the constraints of the medium emasculate the subject matter, leaving it poorly-focused and melodramatic. In my lifetime, I have seen thousands of films, but none has been as unflinching in its approach to this issue as *The War Zone*. For his courage and ability, Tim Roth deserves all the praise and recognition he probably will not get.

Care for Children's Advisory Committee

The Care for Children Advisory Committee commenced in April 1999 as a follow on to the Out of Home, Preventative and Alternate Care committee (OHPAC). The committee, which has an independent Chairperson, represents the government and non government sectors working in the area of out of home care and reports directly to the Director General, Family and Children's Services. The committee's terms of reference are to:

- ♦ promote good quality outcomes for children and young people who are in, moving from, or at risk of entering out of home care and their families, through the coordination and exchange of information and expertise between representatives of government and non government agencies;
- ♦ provide advice on strategies for improving the quality of outcomes through the delivery of intensive family support and care for children's services, particularly in relation to services for Aboriginal children and young people; and
- ♦ undertake other activities as requested by the Director General.

In responding to this the committee sees its members working together collaboratively to continually improve the system of care and quality of services provided for children, young people and their families - before, during and after placement.

The Good Practice forums are intended as one way of achieving this aim. The Care for Children Advisory Committee will hold its 3rd Good Practice Forum in conjunction with the AASW's state conference. The forum will be held in Bunbury on 9th September 2000. Further details are to be circulated on this forum in the near future.

Over 150 people attended the two previous forums held this year. The forums are conducted by field workers involved in the particular case and supported by a facilitator. They have proven popular with participants because of the interactive nature of the presentations. As well as the opportunity to explore good practice issues in the context of specific cases the committee has the longer term aim of drawing together a series of practice principles and identifying barriers which prevent good practice from occurring.

To register for the Good Practice forum to be held in Bunbury in September please contact Catherine Reiche (☎ 92222542 or email: catherr@fcs.wa.gov.au or Sue Knight ☎ 92222601 or email: suekn@fcs.wa.gov.au).

Some of the areas of immediate interest for the committee are improving case management, planning for moving children and young people out of care and prevention services.

The committee has a particular interest in providing opportunities for field workers to develop professionally and has recently sponsored three workers to attend the World Forum:2000 to be

held in Sydney in September. These workers are representative of the government and non government sectors. In conjunction with CYFAA (Children, Youth and Family Agencies Association) the committee is currently sponsoring Dr Lorraine Fox to present a seminar on understanding and intervening with sexual behaviour in substitute care settings. Dr Fox is a consultant trainer in child and youth care, lecturer and editor in the USA and is well regarded internationally in her field.

Please feel welcome to contact the committee's Project Officer, Sue Knight on 92222601 or email suekn@fcs.wa.gov.au if you wish to discuss any aspect of the committee's work. The members of the committee are

- ♦ Patrick Mahoney Chairperson
- ♦ Pauline Bagdonavicius, Executive Director, Strategy and Funding Management, Family and Children's Services
- ♦ Nova Fariss, Director, Mofflyn (nominated by WACOSS)
- ♦ Linda Kazazi, Principal Social Worker, Disability Services Commission
- ♦ Tricia Lee, Executive Manager, Community Services, Anglicare (nominated by WACOSS)
- ♦ Francis Lynch, Manager, Family Services, Mercy Community Services (nominated by WACOSS)
- ♦ Lex McCulloch, Executive Director, Metropolitan Service Delivery, Family and Children's Services
- ♦ Helen Moschini, Coordinator, CREATE
- ♦ Kerry Newick, President, Foster Care Association
- ♦ Dawn Wallam, Director, Yorganop
- ♦ Annette Wells, Director, Juvenile Justice, Offender Management, Ministry of Justice

The Paradox

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more but enjoy less.

We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgement; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.

We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to our life, not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour.

We've conquered outer space, but not inner space; we've cleaned up the air but polluted the soul; we've split the atom, but not our prejudice; we have higher incomes but lower morals we've become long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are the times of tall men, and short character; steep profits, and shallow relationships. There is more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition.

These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes.

It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to make a difference or just hit delete.

Author unknown

CPE Events

Accounting for Social Work Practice: Meeting the Challenge of Social Reconstruction

AASW (WA Branch) State Conference

5-9 September 2000

Perth and Bunbury

Contact: Marian Maughan, Conference Project Officer

Ph: (08) 9330 2585 Fax: (08) 9317 3891

Email: aaswwa@aasw.asn.au

Stress, Trauma and Coping in Emergency Services and Allied Professions

Critical Incident Stress Management

Foundation of Australian Inc Conference

11-13 August 2000

Hilton on the Park, Melbourne

Contact: CISMFA, PO Box 173, North Carlton, Victoria 3054

Phone/fax: (03) 9347 9313

Leading the Social Agenda

WACOSS Conference 2000

22-23 August 2000

Esplanade Hotel Fremantle

Contact: Rena Dawidowicz

Phone: (08) 9420 7222, Fax: (08) 9486 7966

Email: ninder@wacoss.org.au

Casemix 2000 Achieving Health Reform — Going for Gold

27-30 August 2000

Cairns Convention Centre

Contact: Conference Logistics, PO Box 201, Deakin West ACT 2600

Phone: (02) 6281 6624, Fax: 6285 1336

Creativity and Development: Services for the Future

Mental Health Services 10th Annual Conference

29-31 August 2000

Adelaide Convention Centre

Contact: PO Box 192, Balmain NSW 2041

Ph: (02) 9926 6057, Fax: (02) 9926 7078

Email: enquiries@themhs.org

WA Network of Community Based Homes Care Service Inc

Biennial Conference — Responding to the Challenge

9-10 October 2000

Novotel Langley Hotel, Perth

Contact: Conference Secretariat Promaco Conventions

Phone: (08) 9332 2900, Fax (08) 9332 2911

Email: promaco@promaco.com.au

National Respite Conference

Respite: Choosing with Confidence

11-13 October 2000

Sheraton Perth Hotel

Contact: Ph: (08) 9332 2900, Fax: (08) 9332 2911

Email: promaco@promaco.com.au

Cancer Matters — The Way Forward

1st WA State Cancer Conference

12th October 2000

Novotel Langley Hotel, Perth

Contact: Conference Coordinator Melissa Ledger

Phone: (08) 9381 4515, Fax: (08) 9381 4523

Email: mledger@cancerwa.asn.au

Riding the Rapids of Change

National Local Government Community Development Conference

1-3 November 2000 — Perth

Contact: Community Perspectives, PO Box 107, Mt Hawthorn WA 6016

Ph: (08) 9443 7322, Fax: (08) 9443 7423

Email: lgcsa@net1.nw.com.au

4th National Allied Health Conference

Perth, Western Australia

14-16 March 2001

Contact: Moira Butler, Admin Assistant, Conference Secretariat

Fax: (08) 9381 1024

3rd International Conference on Social Work in Health and Mental Health

1-5 July 2001

Tampere, Finland

Contact: Anna Metteri, Dept of Social Policy and Social Work, PO Box 607, FIN-33101 Tampere Finland

Phone: 358 (03) 2156385, Fax: 358 (03) 2157484

Email: anna.metteri@uta.fi

STATE CONFERENCE 2000

Hurry! Hurry!

Get your conference registration in now.

Members please encourage your colleagues to come along. The enclosed notice is for your staff noticeboard.

**THIS IS YOUR CONFERENCE —
MAKE IT A SUCCESS**

Being A New Graduate

In this edition a number of new graduates outline their experiences after entering the workforce.

Speaking with these new grads indicated their enthusiasm for their work and their delight in obtaining their first job. All told of huge work loads and responsibilities together with lack of resources in their agencies. They presented as dedicated and for whom those of us longer graduated should offer our support and encouragement in their early years of practice.

PATTIE BENJAMIN AND GEMMA STAUDE

ALEXIS JACKSON

Bunbury WA February 1998. I want to work in child protection.

Katherine NT, July 2000. How those words have at times come back to haunt me!

When I was asked to submit this article I thought, Why would they want me to write something? I don't do anything really interesting. At least no more interesting than any other social worker in Child Protection. Then I started to really think what I did in this remote town with a town population of 8,000 and a regional population of 38,000. The child protection office I work in has a staff of 9 (not counting administrative staff). It covers a geographical area of 340,000 sq klms (from the Queensland to the West Australian border), 25 major Aboriginal communities, 32 Outstations and numerous camps.

I was given some headings to write to in relation to this article, but decided the easy flow (or waffle) suits me best. I'm constantly challenged in this job every day. I get up in the morning and dress for the day at the office (the make up, jewellery and good clobber). Five minutes later I could be on a plane to a remote community on an urgent child protection matter. Very exciting but hard to plan around!

I remember going shopping for clothes for the new job. Bad move. Somehow chiffon blouses and crepe slacks don't really look that good after changing flats on 4 wheel drives in the red dirt. Nor do they look good after sitting down in the dirt and prickles to have family meetings. The new hair do wasn't faring that well either after the first nit infestation. Never mind, a trip to the hairdresser's and a very short haircut fixed that problem. Oh, and the scabies, I forgot that. The treatment for the problem is worse than the cure. The scabies

treatment burns like hell!

I remember going to a community to investigate a child protection matter in relation to a failure to thrive child some three months ago and no matter how respectful the Aboriginal Welfare Worker and myself were, no matter how many options we gave the family, they were very hostile and in the end threatened to spear the health workers and physically threatened us.

Now, when you're told that you have to do what you consider to be in the best interests of the child by your department, this somehow doesn't quite fit, especially when you're standing there wondering how you would look as a shishebab! I always try to remember in times like this, that people do not like being challenged about their child rearing practices, but it is my job as a worker to do this to ensure that all children grow and achieve their full potential in life.

Shopping is also a further challenge as you are often faced with the prospect of hearing a client in Woolies say 'There is that bitch from welfare. Don't they think I get hungry and need to shop too?' Or when you're in the takeaway grog shop line and a client sees you and then reminds you in a family meeting that 'You drink too. I know. I saw you the other day buying grog. Oh well I'm learning to grow a thicker skin.'

Or going to the only disco in town and seeing a client there who you gave financial assistance to in the morning lurching around in a drunken manner and thinking to yourself 'I've been had again. And then having to do some cognitive reframing and telling yourself 'Well they probably needed to de-stress with the money I gave them to feed little Johnny.'

Yes I'm considered a new graduate, but after eight challenging months I feel like an old hand. But guess what, after all the adventures (for want of a better word) I have experienced since graduating last November, I still want to, and am passionate about, being a child protection worker. The work is never mundane and boring, but always exciting and challenging. Culturally enriching on a daily basis as opposed to the city rat race. Four and a half years at university gave me an excellent theoretical grounding and for that I can never thank my uni tutors enough.

But nothing prepares you for life in the arena of child protection. It is challenging, confrontational, contested, complex and often heartbreaking, but I cannot think of a more rewarding area of social work in which to work.

ALEXIS JACKSON

ELKE KAISER

I consider myself lucky to be amongst those who got the job I had wished for within about three months of finishing my degree. I am now one of four new Mental Health Access Workers for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. While our coordinator is based at the South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre in Fremantle, the other three Access Workers are strategically based in Mirrabooka, Perth, and Maddington.

With each of us being in a different location, one of the big challenges for a new graduate like me is to be out on my own. Still, with means such as telephones and e-mails one of my colleagues is usually available for consultation. Moreover, my previous part-time job as crisis intervention worker for the Sexual Assault Resource Centre surely prepared me to deal with prickly situations on my own. This coupled with the fresh theories and models of social work on my mind I hit the ground running. The most interesting and exciting task currently is to set up this service in our respective geographic areas. This requires a lot of networking, presenting of the project in various forums and making community contacts, all of which I enjoy immensely.

If anything concerned me initially, it was that my skills and knowledge in mental health assessment might not have been sufficient. However, I am confident now that by the time my caseload picks up I will have attended more professional development workshops, used supervision and reading to build up these skills, just as many other social workers, who work in mental health and who learnt their job on the run — as I found out recently.

Despite this being the most exciting and challenging job I dared hoping for, it has not all been smooth sailing. Just finding an office space and getting a desk, computer and telephone in place, turned out to be quite a task. Yet, the real challenges so far did not derive from clients or administration, but from the need to promote our service as a complement to the wide range of public and community based service providers already in existence.

The service that we will be providing is meant to be one of the new breed of support, information, referral and advocacy services, which relies on others to do the clinical as well as the welfare aspects of the job. There are already many referral services out there, while there are too few services left that can actually engage with clients on a medium to long term basis and do what could be called empowering work. To incorporate such principles into my

New Members

The WA Branch welcomes the following new members:

Sarah Beverley (Student Associate)
Diane Drury (Student Associate)
Fiona Main (Student Associate)
Yvonne Markwell (Student Associate)
David Meier
Ann Moffat (Student Associate)
Darryl Nettleton (Student Associate)
Colyn Pietzsch (Wanslea Family Service)
Frances Price (Student Associate)
Terese Reid (Student Associate)
Kristine Robertson (Student Associate)
Kirsty Shalders (Student Associate)
Amanda Splatt (Student Associate)
Kathryn Turnbull (Advocare)
Anne Weighell (Student Associate)
Rachel Wharton (Student Associate)

client work will remain a challenge given the framework of my job description.

When I first heard about this project I felt great enthusiasm for the work at hand, which I wish to share with other service providers. Given that people from CALD backgrounds are still significantly underrepresented amongst service users, particularly in the mental health field, I feel strongly that our service has a role beyond supporting individual clients and families by helping to identify factors and/or fill gaps in the health system which may impact on equitable access to these services.

The main reason why I feel very positive about this work, however, is that I found such support and acceptance as a fully-fledged social worker within my new team and the organisation. Moreover, it is deeply satisfying that as a newly graduated worker I have already found my own brand of promoting social justice for people from CALD backgrounds.

ELKE KAISER

MARIE ARENDS

The idea of leaving the safety of Curtin was daunting. I was focusing on what I did not know, not what I did know! Thankfully I had the support of my second year placement supervisor, who reminded me that I wasn't supposed to know everything. He reminded me, and still reminds me, to think about what I do know. I was encouraged to use the networks that I had built up over the previous two years to

find myself employment. It was through these networks that I gained my first paid job after leaving University, and my networks still provide me with an invaluable source of employment and learning opportunities.

After completing the course and experiencing something of the real world, I recognised the complexities of the issues that young people faced, and felt inadequate to provide any help at all.

Without the support, encouragement and belief of Nic James, my second year supervisor, I would not have gained my first paid job. He put my name forward to the AASW State President, to research the latest information and responses to youth suicide. Not only did this provide me with paid employment, but it also gave me a belief in my abilities, skills and knowledge base.

I joined Nic James in several committees after my first placement as a way of maintaining and furthering my understanding of young people, and probably more importantly the youth and welfare sectors. I believe that it is through this ongoing contact and networking that I have been able to understand more fully the issues that are faced by my client base.

Since then, I have maintained and expanded my network base by joining various committees, personally contacting and attending agencies so that I get to know who I am referring my clients to, and by attending various functions. I have learnt that networking not only provides me with an excellent ability to refer clients appropriately, but also, there is a vast amount of knowledge and practice skills out there to draw on when my skills are lacking. Professional people in all fields are generally very happy to assist you when you ask for their help.

As I work in the youth work sector, and because the focus is different to that of social work, I often find I have ethical and practice issues that arise for me in my work place. Maintaining my social work network alongside of my practice in the youth sector, allows me to draw on the knowledge base of my social work peers. Without their support and assistance I feel that I could have lost the social work perspective that I believe is invaluable to my client base.

Another tool that I have used to ensure my social work perspective has been to purchase my own professional social work supervision. This helps me to ensure that I do not lose my ethical and professional social work perspective/practice standards.

Overall, it has been my professional network that has provided me with the trust in my own skills, greater under-

Social Work Locum

Rock Bay Inc provides services to people with neuromuscular and other neurological conditions.

Expressions of interest are invited for a social work locum - 15 hours per week (5 hours for 3 days), for 9 weeks starting last week of August.

Remuneration dependent on experience.

Applications close 23 August.

Inquiries to Matthew Sloan 9383 5108

standing of the welfare sector, and the ability to provide my clients with the best service I can. It has been my networking that has provided me with new learning opportunities through research projects and policy discussion and participation groups. It has been my network that has provided me with the ability to assist my client base holistically and on various levels. Unfortunately I do not believe that the social work course provided sufficient importance on networking, and I would like to thank the committee for providing me the opportunity to provide new students with this information.

I would like to encourage new graduates to build their networks, and keep building them! They are one of the most important and useful tools they have in building their own professional identity, and in providing a quality service to their client base. Don't just stick to the social work field, but build a broad network in as many fields as possible. Don't be afraid to speak to people at all levels for they are just people after all!

MARIE ARENDS

STATE CONFERENCE

The Branch wishes to acknowledge the support provided by the principal sponsors

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