



The West Australian Social Worker

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WHY CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW THEIR RIGHTS

BY MOIRA RAYNER

Introduction

Janusz Korczak best said why children need to know their rights more than 80 years ago:

'Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with courtesy and respect, as equals.'

Korczak is best known, if at all outside Poland, for a simple heroic act. As a famous paediatrician, well loved writer and public intellectual he could have escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto where he was caring for orphaned and dying children. He refused to leave them. On 6 August 1942 he led a procession of 200 children, marching behind the orphanage flag as if they were going on a picnic, to cattle trucks destined for Treblinka (Lifton 1988).

Korczak's example was far more complex and important than this act of self sacrifice. He was a remarkable advocate of children's rights to be taken seriously. He set up and ran democratic orphanages, making adults as well as children subject to the same rules and to the judgements of courts run by children. He championed an early charter of children's rights. It was in his name that the Polish government urged the UN to establish the International Year of the Child and start the work that resulted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child now ratified by every country but the USA and its strange moral partner, Somalia.

The Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London ('London Children's Rights Commissioner' for short) is inspired by the vision of Janusz Korczak. It is committed to children being taken seriously and to the implementation of their rights under the UN Convention.

About us

The Office of London Children's Rights Commissioner was established in 1999 when its advisory board was appointed, and set themselves the task of appointing the staff. We are supported by a consortium of 'big' children's groups, funded by the National Lottery Charities Board and other charities, and it is our job to be, for London, what other countries have established by statute.

In other European countries, independent offices - children's ombudsmen or commissioners - have been established to involve

children in government decision making and to act as watchdogs over children's human rights. Our office fulfils a similar function for the Great London Authority - to its initial surprise, I might add, since we do not appear in its enabling legislation! Our *raison d'être* is to make the case for a permanent Children's Rights Commissioner with statutory powers for each of the countries of the UK, by doing it for London. If London can get it right, any government can.

We wanted children and young people to be involved in decision making about the office from the beginning, because we wished to model the way that children should participate in decision making. It was they who helped develop the selection criteria and job descriptions, selected the staff and find the premises. They meet at least monthly and are directly involved in all the office's work.

The 12 young people aged between 10 and 17 now on the Board come from all over London and every ethnic and faith group. They have been trained in the responsibilities and powers of an Advisory Board, children's rights, recruitment, being a consultant, dealing with media, presentation and research techniques. Board meetings are held out of school hours in accessible central London venues.

We have begun some major work, most of it focused on London government and all of it on London children.

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Our major consultation with 3,000 children, begun late in 2000, asked them what their priorities were for their London and involved questionnaires, meetings with marginalised and excluded groups, and intensive work with some children on housing estates. The Sort It Out! report was released on 6 April and will help to shape the Greater London Authority's Children's Strategy, which we are helping the GLA to develop.

We have held the first meetings of about 170 groups committed to developing an effective voice for London children with government and children's participation. We are about to publish the first (of what is hoped to be an annual) State of London's Children Report, putting together for the first time the information, research data and demographic information about what it is like to be a child in London. We believe that effective planning and government for children requires an effective model of child impact assessment, and this resource is essential to genuine goal setting and evaluation with children in mind.

We have been engaged by the Mayor to help develop his Children's Strategy, based on his policy to respect children's human rights in all of the GLA's work, and to ensure children's participation in London government.

The office has a values base, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and a commitment to children's involvement in the decisions that affect them the most deeply. This was Janusz Korczak's dream, that adults take children seriously.

We believe that children have rights, and that it is important that they know that they do.

Do children have rights?

Not everyone agrees that children themselves 'own' rights, adults have aspirations for children's well being. But in many ways 'children' and 'rights' and some kind of link are explicit.

1. In international treaties

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is just one international instrument that 'grants' rights to children. They are equally 'entitled' to the human rights asserted in generalist human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the UN's 'special' conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the European Convention on Human Rights which is now part of the law of the United Kingdom with the full implementation of the Human Rights Act in 2000. They are simply not specifically mentioned, and their unique rights (for example, to play, and to protection from exploitation) are not mentioned.

2. Domestic law

In terms of the criminal and civil law children are entitled to live in a society ruled by law, in a civil society which has rules that govern human behaviour without discrimination. Though that is the principle, there is an exception that undermines the assumption that children are 'equally' protected by the rule of law.

It's one of the Common Law's basic rules that nobody is allowed to touch another person without their consent, let alone hurt or hit them. But England has laws that make an exception for children, and enable parents and, sometimes, strangers to inflict pain and humiliation on children in terms of 'reasonable chastisement'. The European Court of Human Rights pointed out at the end of 1998 that this is inadequate to protect children's rights to protection from cruel treatment under the European Convention on Human Rights (A v. UK).

Children sometimes have specific rights under legislation.

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For example in Scotland (under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 S.6) parents are required to consult children of 12 or more about major plans to do with their upbringing! Consultation with children, a 'right' specified in Article 12 of the UN Convention, is administratively demanded in government programs such as Quality Protects. Sometimes children's rights turn up unexpectedly, as our laws develop through the courts.

One such example is the way courts interpret laws after the UK's Human Rights Act was passed. This requires courts to interpret every law so that if it is possible, it is consistent with the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights. In one case decided on 13 February 2001 (Turner J in the Administrative Division of QBD: R v Governor of Dartmoor Prison) the law about a convicted person's right to have 'spent convictions' overlooked was interpreted to give effect to all children's rights to be protected from abuse and harm, and Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Another example is the law of natural justice. A person can challenge a government decision as unfair if a consideration that they 'legitimately expect' will be considered by a government decision maker is not, and they had no opportunity to argue that it should be. For example, in a 1994 case (Teoh v. Minister for Immigration) the Australian High Court said it was procedurally unfair for an immigration official who planned to deport the father of dependent, Australian born children not to tell him, or them, that he did not intend to take into account Australia's promise not to separate a child from their parent without their consent, a Convention right. It was a 'legitimate expectation' that a government decision maker would consider Australia's international obligations under Convention, and unfair not to tell them he wouldn't.

A third is the development of the Common Law. The House of Lords decided to develop the concept of "the mature child" in the case of Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority (1986), which expressly recognised an older child's developing 'right' to make binding decisions about their own medical advice and treatment as they became more mature, without parental intervention. It's now part of Australian law, and no more easy to apply in this country!

3. 'Moral' or philosophical rights

Not many people would argue that children should have, in effect, adult freedoms. It would be absurd and dangerous to ignore the fact that children gradually develop competence and confidence and judgment, and that they are vulnerable and entitled to special protection while they do. Assuming criminality, even from horrendous acts, leads to policies that are clearly inhumane. Some US state criminal justice systems prosecute and sentence quite young children as though they are as culpable as adults for serious crimes (such as the 14 year old facing life imprisonment for 'murdering' a smaller child when he 'acted out' the WWF wrestling he had seen on TV, in 2000).

The differences between childhood and adulthood are real, and the risks of forcing children into 'adult' roles before they are mature are obvious, too. But there is general agreement now that even quite young children can think and make informed choices, sometimes better than adults, if time and care is taken to explain and enable those options. Though no-one would support excessive and damaging state interference in the parenting role (Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (1970, 1983) it is also an important parental task to ensure that children develop their capacity for decision making, in circumstances where they do not assume full adult responsibilities for the mistakes they make.

4. If they're unenforceable, why tell children they have 'rights' at all?

Do children 'need to know' about rights that are entirely theoretical? It used to be argued that unless the 'owner' of a supposed right had the power to choose whether to exercise the right, it wasn't a right at all. On this basis, babies and animals have no rights, though it may still be morally wrong to abuse or maltreat them.

Others argue that, even if the child themselves can't claim or enforce a right, unless someone has a duty to protect that 'right', it doesn't exist. So the Convention right to a decent quality of life in Article 27 is so vague as to be unenforceable and therefore (in Monty Python terms) a 'dead parrot'.

But as MacCormick (1982) has pointed out, sometimes a 'right' is so clearly '*... of such importance that it would be wrong to deny it or withhold it from any member*' of our human society, such as the right to life, that it must exist and a remedy must be found, and the person who ought to fulfil the duties attached to it identified.

5. Can children have rights without responsibilities?

There is also a popular and superficial view that children can't possess rights unless they possess a balancing responsibility, that if they are 'not responsible', in law, or because they are dependent, or because they haven't proved that they are mature, then they can't have rights either.

This is a very old and rather boring argument based on Hohveld's mechanistic view of rights. It is inconsistent with the MacCormick view, just mentioned, which I obviously prefer, mostly because it imposes a duty on us, who are powerful, to undertake the responsibility of finding a remedy for someone who is powerless. The 'no rights without responsibilities' argument is also logically inconsistent: adults possess moral and human rights even when they are thoroughly irresponsible merely because of their age and status, until they are removed.

6. Can children have 'rights' if their 'best interests' don't allow them to be met?

The rights that cause the greatest worry but which have the greatest capacity to improve the quality of children's lives are children's right to be consulted, included in decision making and have their views taken seriously. This finds expression in Article 12 of the Convention and can be described as participation, consultation, autonomy, or 'the right to be heard' depending on the circumstances.

This is the one that gets all parents and teachers agitated. The greatest fear is that by telling children that they have rights, and enabling those claims to be made, we undermine the authority we have over children, which are quite happy to acknowledge is only ours because, as the convention says, the best interests of our children, or at least those for whom we feel responsible, is our first concern.

But the right to be involved in decisions, and to express a view, has many meanings.

Family lawyers often mean by it only that children can make decisions in very limited circumstances, deciding who they would like to live with when a family breaks up, getting medical advice or consenting to treatment, or in schools. Adults, rarely children, tend to assume that it means children having their decisions, however 'mad', respected and followed. We usually mean something much more limited: the right to be consulted, or to participate is a procedural requirement coupled with a duty to explain or feed back if the child's views are not implemented.

There is a large body of research into why some vulnerable children exposed to tremendous risks, stress, maltreatment or deprivation, survive and even thrive. The key question is how to develop and enhance resilience. Because resilient children are competent, able to seek out and take comfort, support and resources from other people - parents, friends, teachers and other supportive adults, they have:

- high self esteem;
- an internal locus of control, a sense of personal power, and the perception of being able to control or direct events (realistic or not);
- optimism and clear aspirations (not depressed or fatalist);
- achievement and goal orientation;
- reflectiveness and problem solving capacity;
- respect for the autonomy of themselves and others; and
- healthy communication patterns (Rayner and Montague, 1999).

Seligman (1995) described resilient children as thoughtful, optimistic, capable children: Goleman (1995) calls them 'emotionally intelligent'. It is my argument that such children have, in one way or another, experienced what it is to be recognised as the possessor or rights.

Conclusion

We are rightly concerned at the wrongs that are done to children, their homelessness, poverty, disease, offending, victimhood, abuse and neglect. But there will be no real improvement in the incidence of these until there is an improvement in the status of children, until their human rights are respected. My argument that children need to know their rights comes down to six statements that can be supported by research and experience:

Children do have rights - internationally guaranteed human rights, specific rights under domestic legislation, within the Common Law tradition, including the influence of international human rights principles on the ways judges interpret and develop the law, and morally. The fact that many of these rights are effectively unenforceable by the children themselves does not affect the validity of these rights. What this does is emphasize the need for a children's champion at government level to ensure those rights are not neglected or denied.

Adults are most concerned about children's 'autonomy' rights, largely because of lack of clarity about what 'consultation' with a child, children's participation and the 'right to be heard' means. Exercising autonomy rights and making choices develops children's maturity and their capacity to make responsible choices. Both children and adults need to learn how to identify potential conflicts of rights claims and conflicts of interests and the skill of dealing with these.

It has become axiomatic that involving the users of services, including children, in their development and evaluation leads to better management and quality assurance. It is also generally agreed that good parents grasp their responsibility to enable

children to develop decision making capacity, by expecting them to, while protecting them from the consequences of mistakes.

Understanding their rights helps develop children's sense of connection, coherence and values. It gives them a framework for evaluating their own relationships with others. It may give them positive experiences and the confidence to seek to influence their own circumstances. It appears to be related to the development of 'emotional intelligence' and skills enabling children to get the resources they need: competent children.

Children who know their rights are more likely to understand their circumstances, to accept that they have a valued place in their environment and to acquire a set of personal values. Children who have experienced being taken seriously are more likely to be resilient children.

Making sure that children know about their rights focuses adult attention on children as moral equals, not the subjects of research, pests to be controlled or possessions to be exploited, pathetically dependent on our goodwill for survival because we hold in our discretion what they need. It acknowledges that we have a shared status, and includes children within the sphere of moral equality.

*Moira Rayner is the Director
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End notes

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Notice

Annual General Meeting WA Branch

21st August 6pm 2001

**Novotel Langley Hotel, Adelaide Terrace,
Perth**

All Members are encouraged to attend this year's AGM to be held at the end of the first day of the state conference.

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. President's Report
3. Vice Presidents' reports
4. Declaration of election results
5. Elections -
 Vice President (Finance)
 Vice President (Social Policy)

Social Work Awards for Excellence 2001

Awards for Excellence - 2001

The Awards for Excellence event on 10 April 2001 was a fitting time in the Western Australian social work calendar to acknowledge the achievements and merits of our social work colleagues who have exceeded the usual standards of professional practice.

The Awards have been presented since 1998. I am pleased to share with you details for each of the five recipients of Awards for Excellence in 2001.

BRIAN DODDS

VICE PRESIDENT (ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE)

SOCIAL WORK AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

1998

Professional Practice & Innovation/Pioneering -
Jan Roberts

Leadership -
Brian Wooller

Management and Innovation/Pioneering -
Warwick Smith

Innovation/Pioneering -
Greg Swensen

Professional Practice -
Dr Pauline Meemeduma

Innovation/Pioneering -
Steve Edwards

1999

Leadership -
Maureen Jewell

Research -
Deborah Brill

Management -
Diane Fergusson- Stewart

2000

Management -
Joe Calleja

2001

Management, Professional Practice, Ethics -
Elizabeth Retamal

Innovation/Pioneering, Policy Development -
Kylie Laughton

Innovation/Pioneering -
Kanthi Perera

Professional Practice -
John de Jongh

Leadership -
Danny Ford

ELIZABETH RETAMAL

Award for Management, Professional Practice and Ethics

In reviewing this nomination, the Selection Panel felt that the nominee clearly deserved an award under the categories of Management, as well as Ethics and Professional Practice.

The nominee has demonstrated consistency in providing accurate and comprehensive information to social workers, employees and agencies about the role of the AASW, social work values and functions. Professional care for the careers and opportunities of new graduates and other social workers who contacted the AASW about professional, ethical, employment and practice issues were clearly demonstrated.

The nominee promoted continuing professional education activities to social workers in Western Australia and her own sense of professional identity enabled her to advise on the professional content and presentation of quality educational events for social workers in Western Australia.

The nominee has strong and effective organisational skills. Colleagues relied heavily on her level of knowledge and objectivity to undertake their own tasks. Administrative and professional support was provided to several committees. Pressure was coped with effectively by setting personal goals and boundaries to enable the business at hand to be dealt with, as well as to help committees maintain deadlines.

The efficient and courteous manner in which the nominee conducted her daily business characterises the qualities associated with excellence in social work practice. They are consistent with our professional values and ethics.

The nominee has provided a very clear role model for her colleagues and has been a capable representative of the AASW for many years. She exercised a management and leadership role and conducted her performance in a professional and ethical manner.

KYLIE LAUGHTON

Innovation and Pioneering

The nominee was one of the key leaders in initiating and implementing a project in assisting recently bereaved relatives of the Sir Charles Gairdner Emergency Department. While there are other bereavement follow-up programmes, this was developed to the specific needs of that area of the hospital. The nominee has managed to produce a system, which allows ongoing support and follow-up in a systematic and structured way in an environment where the norm is acute care, single point delivery and frenetic activity.

Evaluation and feedback from relatives has been overwhelmingly positive and indicates that their family member died in a supportive and caring environment that enabled them to accept the death and to deal with the grieving period. This program has now become policy.

While a hospital emergency department is a traditional area for social work, the implementation of such a policy is unique to that area. The nominee has been acknowledged for her ability to identify the needs of patients which were not being met, and using her skills as a team player, to motivate others in the multi-disciplinary team.

It required substantial stewardship and particular perseverance to introduce it against skeptical and at times strongly resistant medical staff. This initiative clearly developed a client focus, improved communication, outreach and continuity of care in a multi-disciplinary framework.

The work achieved at the hospital was evaluated rigorously by both internal and external review. The proof of her success is seen in the paper that was produced for the prestigious *Medical Journal of Australia*. The project has led to interest from within the hospital and also other hospital emergency departments from the eastern states.

KANTHI PERERA

Innovation/Pioneering

The nominee has been a foundation worker in the early intervention program provided by the Directorate of Mental Health Services at the Fremantle Hospital Health Services. While working with those suffering from mental illness, the nominee's contribution to the area is marked by innovation and creative practice and is notable for its contribution to the prevention of chronic serious mental illness.

The nominee identified the needs of families and consumers of mental health services in the Fremantle area. This led to the development and implementation of the "Early intervention in psychosis" program.

She also implemented a program with the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service to assist young people with mental illness into employment. There is also the ongoing assessment of the group program for families and carers and the program for relapse prevention for consumers.

She has built up the "Early intervention in psychosis" program over the last five years, which has become noted for the breadth of its conception and implementation.

Added to this, the nominee has fulfilled the role of statewide staff educator for mental health practitioners on "Early intervention program for sufferers".

The nominee's personal contribution to this programme also includes the introduction of family sensitive practice, which encompasses helping families with information on mental health and illness; being alert to and assisting with grief and loss issues experienced by clients and families, and including relapse prevention groups for consumers.

The nominee has published a booklet for ARAFMI 1997, called "About mental illness - a book for partners".

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JOHN DE JONGH

Professional practice

The nominee has been practicing social work for twenty five years and has held a great variety of positions in several agencies, including Family and Children's Services. One particular case required a high level of commitment and skills, as well as very good professional and ethical practice skills, in the latter part of 2000.

The case involved the death of a child in a car accident. The child's foster carer and her companion also died in the accident. The nominee's primary work was with the boy's biological father and brother. Working with the child's father was a significant challenge as there had been little contact between father and son. The boy was a non ward and therefore the case was especially challenging to involve the father in events and decision making following the accident. There are many different facets to this case, as well as several staff and different agencies involved.

The case was very problematic, but the nominee's work with the family was regarded as being highly ethical, respectfully inclusive and sensitive to the needs of all those involved, collaborative and he demonstrated skills at an extremely high standard. His work in this case has been described as thorough and excellent.

In particular, the work completed with one of the deceased child's siblings, who reacted very badly to the tragedy, was extremely effective and professional. The family was fully and properly supported through the resulting aftermath.

The nominee maintained his own integrity and helped the family, as well as colleagues, through a very difficult grieving process. Colleagues of the nominee were able to

see his expertise, commitment and high level of skills. The nominee's commitment, professional and ethical practice in this particular case has provided a very good role model for other social workers.

DANNY FORD

Leadership

This social worker has held several positions within Family and Children's Services, which have required vision, self-confidence, initiative and the capacity to motivate others.

In 1997, the nominee was appointed to a key leadership role within Family and Children's Services. It was a newly created position within the Strategic and Funding Management Directorate, which has a mandate to work across directorates to develop and promote effective service delivery, practices and strategies in relation to services to Aboriginal people and communities.

The nominee has taken lead responsibility for the development of the strategic plan for Aboriginal services and serves on several state and federal committees. He interacts regularly with the leaders and staff of key metropolitan organizations, in both a formal and informal manner.

The nominee takes a personal interest in ensuring that Aboriginal staff feel valued and makes contact with Aboriginal staff to see how they are going. The recruitment and retention of skilled and trained staff is vital and his contribution plays an important role in maintaining this.

This social worker has maintained his own integrity against negative reactions from Aboriginal people relating to the history of the department and Aboriginal people, as well as managed and promoted a positive relationship and image. He has significantly enhanced the profile of Aboriginal people throughout Family and Children's Services to improve the recognition of Aboriginal culture, identity and issues in working with Aboriginal families.

He has led this change through a process of conciliation and partnership with individuals and work units. He is highly regarded throughout the department by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff as well as many Aboriginal leaders and communities.

PROGRAM CORRECTION

State Conference

Session 14 Mutual Help Groups and Mental Health

The first line of the session description should read:-

"Research indicates that mutual help groups offer an "in vivo" (real) training ground

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A NEW VISION FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**by Jane Brazier, Acting Director General
Department for Community Development**

Establishing the new Department for Community Development is a major step forward in improving the social wellbeing of Western Australians.

The new department will integrate the functions of Family and Children's Services, Family & Children's Policy Office, Office of Seniors Interests, Women's Policy Office and Office of Youth Affairs.

The integration of these agencies signals a growing recognition that we need to be innovative, to find new ways to facilitate a long term community wide approach to the problems which affect the whole community.

Much greater emphasis will be placed on developing the capacity of individuals, families and communities to "shape their own lives positively". This will occur through effective collaboration within government, by building networks and developing our partnerships with the community and business sectors.

The policy shift is this Government's response to complex social issues which are emerging not only in this state but throughout Australia and the developed world.

A steering committee has been established to guide the development of a corporate strategy, organisational structure and business strategy for the new department. The committee is made up of staff from the current agencies as well as Shawn Boyle from WACOSS.

Three working parties will be set up and all staff are invited to be positively involved in the change.

My aim is for the new department to directly reflect the community development principles we want it to incorporate. Our change process will be guided by the principles of inclusiveness, capacity building, engagement and collaboration.

A key component of the creation of the new department will be seeking participation from the community services sector. The skills and expertise of people working within the sector are enormous and will be keenly sought.

This is an exciting opportunity to create something which can make a real difference to the quality of life in Western Australia.

GRACE VAUGHAN AWARD 2001

Grace Vaughan Memorial Fund

Grace Sydney Vaughan was described as *'one of our profession's most distinguished members, and her life and contributions are truly worthy of celebration'*.

Grace performed a variety of roles within the Social Work area, including consultancy for the Australian Social Welfare Commission, President for the Western Australian branch of Australian Association of Social Workers from 1974 – 1982, and National President of the AASW in 1975.

In 1986, the Grace Vaughan Memorial Fund was established to assist scholarship in areas which promote social justice and human rights.

This year's winner of the Grace Vaughan Memorial Award was social worker Ann O'Neill, who graduated with First Class Honours from Curtin University.

'Honouring survival: Is there a rulebook?' is a piece of research that explores the experiences of secondary homicide victims. This qualitative and participatory research allows people who have encountered the homicide of a family member (secondary homicide victims/survivors – the active participants) to express and explore their experiences.

The dissertation is taken from an emic perspective using narrative techniques, with five in-depth narratives used (including Ann's self interview). Participant's relationships to homicide vary in relation to their own positioning in the world, the type of homicide, their relationship to the victim and to the perpetrator. All of which influence the meaning making process, and the meanings made about the experience.

The research identifies that there were both common and unique components to the experiences explored. Through this sharing of their insights, the reader gains awareness into how the participants have made sense of their lives since their loved one's homicide.

I am humbled to receive this award. Really I am but a face representing so many who are all worthy of such an honour. I must start by thanking Nathan, Lee, Annette, and Richard who all entrusted me with their most precious and sensitive self. This is our award – an award for all who have lost love and life by the hands of homicide and sought to reconcile the injustices presented by the experience.

This dissertation came to fruition through the mammoth efforts of so many people. It represents a communities' weaving of hearts, hands, minds, and resources. Woven into the very fabric of the research are an array of textures, tears, laughter, criticisms, fears, hopes, and a huge amount of courage to risk doing something so new.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Your State Conference

21st - 23rd August 2001

"Social Work in the Marketplace"

It's not too late! !
Not able to attend for three days??
Didn't get what you wanted with an agency ticket??

Check out the program and come for a day! There is lots on offer and there are vacancies in all sessions.

There are no limits on the numbers for the Keynote Speakers, the panel or the debate - take your pick!

Get your registrations in soon though, the Late Fee charges have been waived.

**For further information call Marian
Maughan, Conference Project Officer on
9330 2585 or**

**e-mail
mmaughan@telstra.easymail.com.au**

I would not have ever dreamed of this project let alone completed it without the help of so many people from so many different chapters in my life. To borrow a notion from Cathy Freeman, *'...to name individuals and organisations, would risk forgetting someone'*, and there are so many people who care for me, who helped with this research from its earliest conceptions to its fruition, all of whom I am indebted and eternally grateful to.

I must thank the Grace Vaughan Memorial Fund for believing in this issue, the Women's Policy Office and UWA Faculty of Arts for supporting the award, and all those who inspired and guided me from Curtin University Humanities Division.

ANN O'NEILL

The award is being used to develop a web site from which to disseminate this and other information to secondary homicide victims and the professionals who provide support to them.

It is envisaged as a forum to converse with others, and to raise awareness of the issues. Ann is currently seeking volunteers for this project who have time and experience in applying for grants (or who are willing to learn). The project will require funding to maintain the pages and administer differing aspects.

You can contact Ann at oneillam@ses.curtin.edu.au or by leaving a message with the WA Branch.

Letters

The Editor

In the July 2001 issue of The West Australian Social worker there is a reference in the President's Report to the appointment of part time WA Branch social policy officer as complementing "...National's plans to increase social policy support at the National level to a full time equivalent. To date that position has only been a part time one." (p. 3).

Probably this *is* a long term plan of the Board's, but readers may get the impression that social policy is now, or in the near future, being resourced to the tune of a full time position at national level.

While many people continue to refer to the position as "Social Policy Officer" it is, and always has been, "National Policy Officer". The distinction is more than semantic. The National Policy Officer works to the National Practice Standards Committee, the National Ethics Committee and the National Social Policy Committee, as well as supporting work on fees and allowances and professional recognition.

The social policy component of the position has never been more than 50% of the total time allocation. In real terms that means that until 1/7/01 12 hours a week were available for national social policy work. From 1/7/01 there will be 19 hours a week allocated to national social policy.

While this will increase the AASW's capacity to take an active role in social policy it is still a long way from a full time position dedicated solely to social policy.

And while Sarah considers herself to be reasonably efficient in her work habits, she would not want members to be under the impression that there is a full-time equivalent working on national social policy issues. This may lead to disappointment and the impression that "National" is not delivering what it should.

Ian Rentsch
Chief Executive Officer

NEW MEMBERS

The WA Branch welcomes the following new members.

Michele Byrne	Family and Children's Services
Mike Davids	Family and Children's Services
Hazel Roome	Relationships Australia
Gregory Walsh	Family and Children's Services

Regional Subcommittees

Goldfields Regional Subcommittee

The move to rural WA has given me a first hand knowledge of the challenges social workers face when working in isolation, or in an area which is very limited in resources. This was most evident in Carnarvon, where for a very long time there was only one social worker in a 500 kilometre radius. At the time of my leaving Carnarvon and moving to Kalgoorlie, that had changed marginally.

Peer support becomes vital in Professional Practice in any of the rural areas. It becomes so easy to lose your social work identity when working in isolation. As a result I have been enabled to assist in the formation of a sub-committee for rural social workers in the Kalgoorlie area. We have discovered 20 social workers and two external students, all thinking there was only two to three social workers in the area. The students did not know of the existence of each other.

Many of us meet on a monthly basis, where there is a combination of information sharing, role models, debriefing and general socialisation. We have participated in various events within the town site, and are examining the possibility of conducting workshops in the future.

Membership consists of social workers from Commonwealth and State Departments, private sector, as well as private practice and community based services. Included in our group are indigenous and ethnic representation. Experience ranges from new graduates, to people with many years of experience. There is also a good gender mix which contributes to the great balance of the group.

Due to the intensity of the nature of our work, the comments most frequently made are, how refreshing to be able to socialise, using social work language (jargon) while at the same time, support and encourage each other. The variety of skills and social work practice experience the group provides for each other broadens our knowledge base tremendously, and if a problem does arise in the work place, we now have a network of people to call on for direction.

One special feature which we are looking forward to is the visit of some members from the Schools of Social Work to look at the possibility of establishing a support branch of the Schools of Social Work at the Kalgoorlie Campus of Curtin University. These people have asked to meet with the local social work support and network group in August.

This group has been meeting since December 2000. After initial trial and error we finally settled on a specific time to meet that suits the majority of all who are able to attend.

The group meets on the 4th Tuesday of the month. We are experimenting with meeting in different homes. Surprisingly this is turning out very well. One of the meeting areas is very small. So, to overcome any seating or drinking/eating problems, members were encouraged to bring their own seat, cup/glass and or plate.

THANK YOU TO THE CONFERENCE SPONSORS

The Committee of Management and the Conference Committee of the AASW WA Branch wish to thank all the agencies who are supporting the State Conference through sponsorship.

In particular we wish to thank Principal Sponsors Centrelink and Community Development Family and Children's Services for their continued support.

We also wish to thank Major Sponsor, Ministry of Justice for their support.

The Western Australian Branch appreciates your valuable contribution towards the professional development of social workers in this state

This certainly broke the ice and removed any barriers which may have been present in this new venture. It also confirmed that those who live in small units can also host a meeting, as well as those who live in larger space.

So if you are visiting Kalgoorlie contact myself on ph:9022 0700 or one of the members and come and join in with our SW network and support group.

DAWN MIELENS

South West Regional Subcommittee

The South West Subcommittee has been involved in some important projects over the last year. The first of these was members' involvement in the planning of the Annual Conference in Western Australia. The year 2000 saw the first regional component of this conference come to fruition and members of the sub committee helped to plan the Bunbury based component of the conference. Perhaps a highlight of the conference was the addition of a 'Speaker's Corner' which enlivened early morning attendees and a few of the staff at the lovely Sanctuary Resort as well.

The subcommittee's plan for the year 2000-2001 was to enhance CPE in the South West with the goal to attract presenters to Bunbury and beyond! The first CPE event to be offered for the year was a workshop by Suzanne Jenkins in regards to working with children who have experienced sexual abuse. The workshop was extremely well attended and reports of the day were that it was a great learning experience.

Another 'outreach' workshop was the Research Symposium which was held in Perth and then presenters journeyed to Bunbury for a well-earned break from the city. The day included presenters Maria Harries, Dr Paul Murphy and Kate Mevik who covered such topics as ethics in research, research grants and encouraged small group discussions about research topics. This was another well-attended event with Edith Cowan University students using it as an opportunity to gain further knowledge about research skills.

Social Work Day was celebrated in the South West by having a breakfast gathering. This was held at the Parade

**Community
Development**

Improving the social wellbeing
of Western Australians

**The Department for
Community Development
is proud to be sponsoring
the AASW (WA) 2001
conference
"Social Work in the
Marketplace".**



Hotel and despite the chilly morning attendees enjoyed the beautiful estuary views and a hearty breakfast. All reported enthusiastically on the opportunity to network with colleagues and friends.

A final project for the sub-committee has been the attempt to bring Narrative Therapy training to the South West at a discounted price. Despite much interest in the training we have not yet received the full amount of attendees required to hold the training. It is hoped that we will be able to do so in this financial year. Here a special thank you must be given to Anne Pickard for her strong support and leg work in making the Narrative Therapy Training a possibility.

Whilst on the subject another thank you and farewell is offered to Lyn O'Brien who has been a major figure in the South West sub-committee. Lyn has left Bunbury for the giddy heights of Mandurah and we offer her our best wishes in her new position. As convener of the sub committee I would like to thank both Liz Retamal and Meredith Doyle for their support in this often busy role and also Tracey Turner for her support in the day-to-day administration and management of the sub-committee.

The Sub-committee hopes the year 2001-2002 will be a bright one with a breakfast to welcome Spring occurring on 6th September 2001.

The new convener for the South West sub-committee has not yet been chosen but Tracey Turner will continue to be the contact person. Any members working in the South West region are welcome to join the group. For any inquiries Tracey can be contacted on (08) 97928980.

REBECCA JURY

OPEN INVITATION

For all country and metro members to observe Branch Committee of Management Meetings.

- Coffee
- Networking
- Professional Development
- You're Welcome!

Lotteries House, 2 Delhi Street, West Perth
on the 2nd Tuesday of each month

Phone Meredith 9420 7240

Call for Nominations Branch Ethics Committee

In accordance with the Australian Association of Social Workers By-Laws on Ethics, nominations are being called for 4 positions on the Branch Ethics Committee. The Committee contributes to discussions, debate and policy surrounding ethical practice of social workers as well as responding to concerns expressed, and mediating resolutions of complaints, about the ethical practice and conduct of social workers in relation to the code of ethics. The nominee must be:

- a member of the AASW of good standing within the profession; and
- have not less than 7 years practice experience in the profession; and
- provide a curriculum vitae to the Committee of Management.

Appointments to the Ethics Committee are made, from the nominations received, by the Branch Committee of Management. Appointment is for a two year period (with a right of renewal totalling not more than three consecutive terms)

If you would like further information about the work of the committee or the role of a Branch Ethics Committee member then contact John de Jongh Convenor of the BEC (9313 4080 after 6pm weekdays). Closing date for nominations will be 5 pm Friday 31st August 2001