



# The West Australian Social Worker

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Did you Celebrate the 21st?

Hi - hope that by the time you read this newsletter you were indeed part of the 21st birthday celebrations for the Branch's Annual State Conference. Twenty one successive state conferences is a feat equalled by no other Branch in the Association. This year's conference, Social Work in the Marketplace, was the usual outstanding continuing education opportunity.

Participants were treated to a thought provoking key note by Professor Peter Botsman. Titled, "*From the social welfare state to the social enterprise state*", Peter raised food for thought about social workers in the market place. An exceptionally good paper was presented by Jim Ife called "*Getting back to basics: markets and community*", where Jim cautioned us as social workers about the pitfalls for our clients associated with the Marketplace and urged us not to fall into some of the economic driven traps such as referring to clients as customers and the like.

Anyone who attended the Conference dinner was clearly mesmerised by Sheila Suttner who once again so clearly illustrated how her social work skills helped her to really make a difference in terms of social justice and social change. The range of papers and workshops presented at the Conference were clearly top class. A fun and important session was the Great Debate, this year focusing on whether "*Legalising illicit drugs is socially responsible*". A truly entertaining session!

A new addition to this year's conference was the art exhibit where members demonstrated that many social workers not only make a difference as social workers but possess amazing talent and significant creativity. Another welcome addition was the reconciliation banner where participants left their handprints and messages concerning our wishes and hopes for Reconciliation. Following on from last year's success was the Speaker's Corner that provided a forum for participants and agencies to speak about social work issues and practice and what social work means to all of us. Truly inspiring. By all reports, the Conference was a job well done!

### Scholarship Winners

This year the Branch was able to sponsor two remote practitioners to attend the State Conference. They were Helen Fleming, Department for Community Development, Derby and Joe Harding, also from DCD from the Karratha Office.

An online version of this newsletter can be found at  
<http://westausasw.highway1.com.au/>

A new scholarship this year is the Erlene Chun Scholarship for students who otherwise would not be able to attend the Conference. Winners for the inaugural award were Liz Haynes, final year social work student from Edith Cowan University, Bunbury and Claire Fisher, final year student from Curtin University.

### Thanks to the Conference Committee

Speaking of a job well done, I want to thank the Conference Committee comprised of Fiona Denman, Kathy Fenner, Adam Johnson, Anne Pickard and Paul Whelligan. A special thanks and congratulations goes to Sarah Kemp, convener, whose leadership resulted in a quality conference. Thanks too to Meredith Doyle, Branch Executive Officer for her help and support.

### Special Thanks to Marian Maughan

Bet you thought when reading the preceding paragraph that I forgot to say thanks to Marian Maughan, Conference Project Officer. Of course there is no way that I, or any one else for that matter, could forget to say thanks to Marian who once again worked tirelessly to produce a top quality conference.

I am sad to say, from the Branch's perspective that is, that Marian has decided to "retire" this year from the project officer position. Marian has held that position for 10 years. Prior to that she convened numerous conferences as well as the AASW's national conference held in Perth in 1987.

When I reflect back on Marian's career with the Branch and with our conferences, I can't even begin to imagine conferences without her. At a surprise going away dinner held in her honour by the COM and past conference convenors on Tuesday, August 28th, her dedication to the conference process, the Branch, the Association and the Social Work profession was recognised as exceptional and all in attendance concluded that we will all miss her contributions dearly. Marian, good luck for a successful retirement from the Conference as you move on to the next venture in your life. I know that whatever you choose to do, you will make significant contributions there too. We'll miss you dearly!

### Branch AGM

As in the past, the Branch AGM was held in conjunction with the Conference. Those of you who attended heard the wide range of activities undertaken this year by the Branch and the exciting and innovative plans for the coming year. At the forefront of those plans is piloting having a Branch social policy officer to assist the Branch to provide a more timely response to social policy and media issues as well as be more proactive in relation to social policy matters.

The Branch also plans to make registration for social workers a key initiative. The Registration Committee, chaired by Brian Dodds, Vice President for Ethics and Professional Practice would welcome you joining to lend your energy to this important matter - important both for our clients and for our profession.

### **Branch Committee of Management**

I am happy to announce that the following were elected at the AGM to the Committee for Management for 2001 - 2003:

**President:** Barbara Meddin

**Vice President for Education:** Anne Pickard

**Vice President for Finance:** Norma Welsh

**Vice President Social Policy:** Chris Coopes

**Committee of Management Members:**

John de Jongh

Dawn Mielens

Sarah Kemp

Jennifer Hannan

Patricia Benjamin

They join those COM members whose terms expire in 2002, Brian Dodds (Vice President, Ethics and Professional Practice), Richard Wilkins (Secretary) and COM members Mary Joyce, Francis Lynch, Rosina Pruitt and Michele Speed.

### **Meeting with Ministers**

As one of the Branch's key social policy initiatives, the Branch has sought meetings with Ministers who carry social welfare portfolios.

To date, Brian Dodds, John de Jongh, Chris Coopes and I have met with Hon Sheila McHale whose Ministerial portfolios include Community Development, Seniors, Youth, Disabilities and the Arts. Issues raised with Minister McHale were:

- registration;
- resourcing of services;
- services to rural and remote areas and to indigenous people, and
- providing a voice for children and adolescents.

Minister McHale has agreed to meet with the AASW on a quarterly basis. She also agreed, among other things discussed at the meeting, to consider how the AASW can have input into the creation of the new Department for Community Development.

By the time you receive this newsletter we will have also met with Hon Jim McGinty. Minister McGinty who is the Attorney General is also the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs and Electoral Affairs. On the agenda for that meeting was the following four issues:

- the admissibility of evidence in the Family Court;
- absence of comprehensive rehabilitation services in the prisons system and the role of social workers in relation to these;
- mandatory sentencing; and
- registration for social workers.

I'll keep members posted as to outcomes of future meetings. If you have issues you would like to see on the agenda of any of the forthcoming Ministerial meetings, please let me know.

**Dr Barbara Meddin**  
**Branch President**

## **CALLING ALL COUNSELLORS INVOLVED IN ANY ASPECT OF INFERTILITY COUNSELLING**

***We need you to be a volunteer for  
10 minutes***

To fill in a questionnaire on counselling services for people dealing with issues related to fertility/infertility.

The Reproductive Technology Council (Council) is conducting an audit of counselling services for people dealing with fertility/infertility issues.

A Parliamentary Select Committee that reviewed the Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991, during 1997-1999, recommended an audit of counselling services, in response to its concern that some people undergoing assisted reproductive treatments may not have sufficient counselling support.

In the first phase of the audit, patients, clinic staff and 'approved clinic counsellors' ('approved counsellors' are recognised by the Reproductive Technology Council as qualified and experienced counsellors, who possess a significant knowledge of the special issues associated with fertility and infertility) were surveyed.

The Council now wants to get an indication of the extent of infertility counselling being carried out by counsellors outside the fertility clinic setting and the potential demand for such counselling.

A questionnaire has been prepared for the survey purposes.

If you are interested in completing the questionnaire, could you please contact Patrice Wringe for a copy of the questionnaire -

**Tel: (08) 9222 4307**

**Fax: (08) 9222 4236**

**Email: [patrice.wringe@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:patrice.wringe@health.wa.gov.au)**

**or**

**download a copy from the RTC website -**

**<http://numbat.murdoch.edu.au/RTC/rtchome.html>**

# Letters

## Unjust Comment

Let's hope that Justice Mary Gaudron's judgements are better considered than her remarks reported in Inside Cover ("Social Workers get short shrift", 8 August 2001).

Social workers routinely serve the community in positions where they promote the interests of people in vulnerable or powerless situations – often children, the elderly, people with disabilities or those escaping domestic violence. They often work in dangerous and violent situations where they are required to make complex decisions about the most important aspects of family life.

Qualified social workers have done a minimum of four years of tertiary study, often more. Members of the Australian Association of Social Workers are bound by a stringent code of ethics. Comments such as those by Justice Gaudron are perhaps further indication that the State Government should legislate to allow the registration of professions such as social work so that the community can be assured of a high standard.

**Dr Barbara Meddin, accredited social worker**

President, Australian Association of Social Workers (WA Branch).

(Published in Letters to the Editor, The West Australian, 10 August 2001)

## No one cares

Percy is a brilliant young man who suffers with a personality disorder. In the months when he is well he is a first class scholar. Then, without warning, he is sick, expanding on his unique insight into mankind, which is consummately evil.

At these times he regards himself as particularly evil, and his self-loathing drives him to slash himself unmercifully and swallow handfuls of over-the-counter pills, often washed down with copious amounts of alcohol.

When we go to accident and emergency departments his physical wounds are tended. His psychological wounds are treated with indifference. Although he is demonstrably out of touch with reality, he is sent off to kill himself if he will.

My arguments regarding our duty of care we have to people who are a danger to themselves are treated with disdain because Percy does not have a classic mental illness. I have, on several occasions, pleaded for the life of my client and asked for an involuntary admission. These days it does not wash.

I would strongly recommend an urgent review of the treatment of suicidal patients in this State. Or perhaps, with the dearth of funding for public hospitals, it is more convenient for tortured souls like my client, who does not meet the present treatment criteria, just to go away and quietly dispatch themselves?

**Paddy Glasgow, social worker, psychotherapist**

(Published in Letters to the Editor, The West Australian, 10 August 2001)

## The Editor

I read with interest at page 8 in the August 2001 edition of *The West Australian Social Worker* the article by Jane Brazier, A/Director General, Department for Community Development, entitled "*Community Development: A New Vision for Western Australia.*" In the article, Ms Brazier lists the functions that will come under the new department: Family and Children's Services; Family and Children's Policy Office; Office of Seniors' Interests; Women's Policy Office; and Office of Youth Affairs.

Was I the only one to notice that there is a sizeable demographic group (ie about half the population) whose interests are not acknowledged in this list and who have no dedicated office addressing their needs (notwithstanding their health problems, their high suicide rate and the well publicised incidence of their difficulties in marriage and family life)? ie men.

No doubt some of the above services endeavour to cater for both sexes. However, despite the acknowledgement in recent times by both State and Commonwealth governments that men are not well catered for in social service agencies, we still have an inequitable situation (some might say unjust) in which millions of dollars are spent supporting departments, organisations, conferences and public events which cater exclusively to women, while there is no equivalent Office of Men's Interests (or Men's Health) and men's organisations by and large run on the smell of an oily rag.

For many years we have had a situation of 'affirmative action' to address the disadvantages of women, an appropriate redressing of imbalances and inequities by means of funding for women's services. We now face what is arguably an epidemic of urgent problems and needs amongst men which requires similar 'affirmative action'. (Let's not confuse the structural advantage that some men enjoy in our society with the health and wellbeing of the gender at large.)

I look forward to the day when the health and wellbeing needs of men are taken as seriously as those of women, seniors, young people and children. I hope that day is not too many years away.

Noel Giblett

## Team Leaders/Managers/Employers!

Do you need Social Workers in a hurry in your agency?

### LOCUM REGISTER

The AASW WA Branch provides a locuum register service free to members and employers.

If you need staff or you want to go on the locuum register contact Meredith at the Branch Office. Tel 9420 7240 Fax 9310 3936 or email [aaswwa@highway1.com.au](mailto:aaswwa@highway1.com.au)

## OPEN INVITATION

For all country and metro members to observe Branch Committee of Management Meetings - coffee, networking and professional development.

**You're Welcome!**

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

**Phone Meredith 9420 7240**

## NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE FAMILY COURT

Cases before the Family Court where domestic violence is suspected, alleged or substantiated are now being considered separately under the Court's new pilot project Columbus. The focus is on child protection and early intervention.

The project aims to improve the quality of outcomes for the children and reduce resources required later in the proceedings through; early identification and fast tracking of relevant cases, a multi-disciplinary team approach to case management and sharing of information between the Family Court and relevant stakeholders.

Practitioners are invited to attend the symposium *In the Best Interests of the Child: Inter-disciplinary Approaches to Child Abuse and Family Violence*. The symposium will be held in Perth on 9 November and will feature speakers including the Hon Alistair Nicholson, Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, Dr Thea Brown, Monash University and Belinda Fehlberg, University of Melbourne.

The program will explore the relationship between the social sciences and legal practice through the lens of therapeutic jurisprudence. It will also present current research relevant to both professional disciplines and provide legal practitioners with a venue to discuss trends at the cutting edge of good practice. To register contact Anna Benedetto, Administration Officer, Family Court Counselling Service on 08 9224 8240 or email [anna.benedetto@justice.wa.gov.au](mailto:anna.benedetto@justice.wa.gov.au).

## CORRECTION

**Making Contact With Adolescents**

**Dr Stephen Briggs**

**Monday 24th September 2001**

The original flier advertising this event has an incorrect day published. The correct date for this workshop is Monday 24 September 2001

Places are limited so register early. Enquiries to: Meredith Doyle ph: 9332 0019 or fax your registration to 9310 3936 or post to PO Box 198, West Perth WA 6872.

## POSTGRADUATE STUDIES IN SOCIAL WORK UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

At the University of Queensland, you can undertake postgraduate studies in social work or social administration on a full or part-time basis. Our programs appeal to a wide range of social work practitioners.

They are designed for flexible learning; many are suitable for study at a distance and you can tailor a program to suit your needs.

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- Masters (12 courses: 3 concentrations)
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### Postgraduate research programs

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- Social policy analysis
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- Community development
- Social research in the human services
- Practice leadership in human service practice
- Advanced counselling practice
- Advanced family therapy practice

For more information view our website at [www.uq.edu.au/socwork/student-info/pg-courses](http://www.uq.edu.au/socwork/student-info/pg-courses)

To contact the School of Social Work and Social Policy or obtain a prospectus:

**Phone (07) 33652068 or**

**Email: [socwork@social.uq.edu.au](mailto:socwork@social.uq.edu.au)**