



The West Australian Social Worker

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GRACE VAUGHAN MEMORIAL LECTURE 2002

BY PROFESSOR LOWITJA O'DONOGHUE

Grace Vaughan's commitment to social justice was evident throughout her life, and summed up perfectly in her first speech to Parliament in July 1974, when she said, and I quote.

"We must regard all people as resources, not liabilities, and this includes everyone: the disabled - both physically and intellectually; those new to our country - the migrants; and those first in our country - the Aborigines; those women who have been deserted by their husbands; and those children who have been deprived by our society. All people are resources. They all have a part to play."

This thinking is not only fair and equitable and compassionate. It's also strategic. Such thinking values the building of social capital over economic capital. It acknowledges the contribution that everyone can make and should be encouraged to make. It's certainly a way of thinking that would have helped my people to feel that their 50,000 years of culture – the oldest living culture in the world – was something of value. Not something to be brutally colonised, ravaged, and discarded.

So, yes, Grace was I think, ahead of her time. And I think she would have been appalled at how little we have advanced in the 18 years since her death. We still have a situation where Indigenous Australians have third world health status, where our children are dying as babies at the same rate as in the poorest countries in the world. And where Indigenous life expectancy is 18 – 20 years lower than for the non Indigenous population.

We still have a situation where our educational participation achievement is dramatically lower than that of the rest of the population. We still have a situation where Indigenous unemployment rates are over 50%, and where most Aboriginal people live below the poverty line. And where 60% of Australian youth in care or custody or other forms

of detention will be Aboriginal. Where 20% of adult male prisoners and 80% of female prisoners are Aboriginal. This in a society where we make up only 2% of the population!

I catalogue these statistics not to shock you, nor to numb you into despair. But I do not want to shy away from the enormity of the problem. It is a problem deeply rooted in history. And yet we might have expected that in a civilised first world country, we might have made some progress towards redressing these historical inequities.

Historically, as many of you are aware, Indigenous people were barely regarded as human. The idea of their human rights was therefore not at issue. In fact, at the time of settlement, or invasion as it was experienced by my people, it was fashionable in scientific circles to attempt to define us as a sub human species. It was this underlying belief – that we were less than human – that made it 'justifiable' to try to eliminate us.

As you know, this was approached brutally - and our culture was almost wiped out. It was done not only by acts such as violence and murder – but also with introduced diseases and alcohol. Our people and culture had been all

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but destroyed, and there was no place or welcome in the new order. Perhaps you can imagine that against these odds, we feel enormous pride that we have survived and maintain our strength.

But we have to battle from the margins. We have been struggling to connect with our own people, our past, our own values - and, at the same time, struggling to find a viable place in the white fellas' world. This is an ongoing struggle and one in which it often feels like "one step forward and three steps back".

And to Australia's shame the plight of our people is still drastic enough to warrant United Nations Human Rights scrutiny and criticism. Australia's record has been examined by a number of United Nations Committees on a number of occasions in recent years including:

- The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- The Human Rights Committee.
- The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

And it has been found wanting.

I want to reflect here for a moment on some implications of this - because I find it so profoundly depressing. And I am sure that Grace Vaughan would have too. It seems obvious to me that when we examine Australia's history, the wrongs of the past can be explained in part by colonial attitudes of the time. They can be explained by their ignorance, by their arrogance, and by their complete disregard of the value of others. The value of difference.

We are supposed to know better now. We are supposed to have put all this behind us. And yet, it is these very same values that still drive structural and systemic racism - and we see it all around us today.

Such views are evidenced daily by our political leaders - they form the diet of talkback radio - and they are becoming so commonly accepted that anyone who questions them is now referred to as one of "the chattering classes". Which of course is supposed to mean - one of the useless people - irrelevant - and notable as nuisance value only.

We are living in a climate dominated by the idea that whatever happens to an individual is a result of their own actions and choices. If you make any suggestion that the playing field may not be level - or that some people have fewer choices than others - you are dismissed as a bleeding heart. Or as being politically correct and boring. Often this

kind of thinking focuses on simplistic band-aid solutions, rather than looking at causes and prevention.

For example, prisons are being built at an unprecedented rate. There are increasing numbers of people in custody and prisons are becoming big business as they become increasingly privatised. The Federal Government knew that the popular appeal of mandatory sentencing was a greater vote winner than meeting its obligations to United Nations treaties. And it refused to overturn legislation in WA and the Territory that was clearly racist in its consequences, if not its intentions.

It is to the credit of Claire Martin in the Northern Territory that she rescinded this draconian legislation as her first act as Chief Minister. Mandatory sentencing both disempowers and brutalises the magistrates required to enforce it, and it imposes on offenders senseless and cruel retribution for often trivial offences. It has contributed to a generation of Aboriginal youth who have come to see jail as an inevitability - their rite of passage to adulthood.

Note: This is an extract from the 2002 Grace Vaughan lecture. The full text of Professor O'Donoghue's speech is available from the WA Branch's website.

THE ROLE OF VALIDATION THERAPY IN DEMENTIA MANAGEMENT

Presented by Naomi Feil

Executive Director, Validation Training Institute

Melbourne 27 August 2002

Hobart 28 August 2002

Perth 30 August 2002

Darwin 2 September 2002

Sydney 4 September 2002

(Also workshops in New Zealand prior to Australian Tour)

"Validation is based on an attitude of respect and empathy for older adults with Alzheimer's - type dementia who are struggling to resolve unfinished business before they die". (Feil N. 1996, *The Validation Breakthrough*)

Registration Information from

**VALIDATION THERAPY RESOURCE &
TRAINING CENTRE**

PO Box 1141, Surrey Hills North

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Fax: (03) 9888 4968

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BRANCH CPE ACTIVITIES

Tours of Aboriginal sites of significance

The AASW has, as a major objective of the Association, the promotion of reconciliation. To progress this objective the state branch has been consistently presenting opportunities for members to inform themselves and participate in reconciliation activities. Members may recall our participation in the Bridges walk as well as workshops at the state conference and reconciliation banner signing

As a part of its objective to encourage reconciliation, the CPE Subcommittee organised two tours of a number of important Aboriginal sites. It was hoped that the Tour of the City of Melville (co sponsored by the City of Melville) and the bush walk through the Walyabup Trail would be an innovative way of learning more about Aboriginal culture, the uses of bush foods and medicine and the significance of the land to Noongar people in our local environs from Aboriginal people.

Twelve individuals toured important Aboriginal sites in the City of Melville. Gail Beck, the City of Melville's Aboriginal Liaison Officer spoke of Midgegooroo and his son Yagan, leaders of the Noongar family from this area, who had first contact with white settlers arriving on the Swan and Canning Rivers. The group gained an insight into the importance of Wireless Hill to Yagan's command of the area at the time that the first settlers arrived. The group were able to see the breadth of view he had to see to the Darling Ranges, the ocean and along the river, surveying most of the area he and his father were custodians of and also heard of the value of this position for him to send smoke signals to other groups on the other side of the river.

In addition to Wireless Hill, a number of other sites of particular cultural and historical interest including, Heathcote, and Piney Lakes were visited. The whole area was widely used and populated by Aboriginal groups and is still being used by Aboriginal people today.

Piney Lakes was a site used for women's business including birthing rites, a number of stillborn babies were buried in this area. Piney Lakes were an integral part of the lake system and therefore of the Wagal dreaming. It was a site that was also used to teach the children about bush tucker and how to take care of the environment. An aboriginal community group is working towards developing a centre in this area to continue to provide this learning to Aboriginal people.

Gail also explained that during building works it was discovered Murdoch University had been built on a major burial site and since learning of this the University has held a ceremonies with the assistance of Aboriginal elders to enable the area to continue to be used and to allow Aboriginal students the chance to recommence their studies at the University.

Some brochures with a summary of the history for this region have been provided to the AASW by the City of Melville and if people are interested in receiving a copy of this please phone the office on 9420 7240.

A group of 30 went on the Walyabup Trail in Beelie National Park on the Sunday led by a newly forming indigenous business, *The Walyabup Trail Guides*. Beelie Regional Park is known by Aboriginal people as the Walyabup Lake area. The guides Noel and Elizabeth Morrison, pointed out ways to use the local zamia palms, grass trees, tee trees, marri, jarrah, banksia and wattle trees for bush foods and medicines. Aboriginal people are the custodians of a large wealth of knowledge about the Australian bush and still use the bush medicines actively today.

There was also a lighter side to the use of the bush foods with the group dubbing the banksia tree as the "chewing gum tree" because of some of the sap that was used by Aboriginal people to chew on as they walked and the native wisteria as the "skipping rope vine"- used to amuse bored children during campfire and storytelling time.

Noel and Elizabeth emphasized to the group the need to "listen" to the Bush and to tread lightly. "Noongar people have lived in this area for thousands of years without harming the environment, burning off every three to four years or so moving according to the six seasons of weather found in WA as the food cycles would change." Barry Warburton, Education Department Youth Officer who has been helping the group to become established, explained that really "Aboriginal people had been harvesting and farming in one way or another in the area for centuries".

Participants enthused about the experience and enjoyed the opportunity to come to an event with family as well as learn new information about Perth. Some requests were made to hold something similar in Bunbury or Mandurah and this is being looked at for a future event.

Photo 1

A group of social workers, colleagues and children braved the rain to tour significant Aboriginal sites throughout the City of Melville

Photo 2

Noel Morrison & Barry Warburton speak to the group about the uses of the 'Balgo' bush or grass tree for medicinal purposes and food

**Visit of Associate
Professor Kristjana Kristiansen**

Associate Professor Kristjana Kristiansen, visited New Zealand and Australia on sabbatical leave this year and called into Western Australia in April 2002. Kristjana, Associate Professor at the Department of Social Work and Health Sciences, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, described herself as more of an anthropologist than a psychologist. Her curriculum vitae demonstrates her commitment to research in the area of human behaviour, and in particular research around gender issues and various aspects of disability.

On 10 April 2002, Professor Kristiansen presented two papers under the title "Women and Insanity". The first paper was a report on a survey of the needs of people with mental illness as seen from the consumers of services and the providers of services. The members of each of the two groups were asked to assess the effectiveness of the services. Maybe not surprisingly, there was no significant correlation between the stated needs of the consumers and the needs of those people identified by the service providers. The consumers identified their needs as appropriate housing, solutions to poverty, overcoming loneliness, and having someone to talk to. The professionals from service provider organisations identified the needs of people with mental health problems in terms of having well resourced facilities, professional services, and effective and efficient service delivery. The two groups were later brought together to look at each other's responses and it was clear that there were, in Kristjana's words, "two versions of reality" about the needs of people mental illness and how services addressed those needs.

The results of this research have been submitted to the Norwegian government for inclusion in their mental health reform. It is hoped there will be a move from the medical model to one which takes account of the societal dimensions of problems and solutions.

The second paper presented by Professor Kristiansen was about research into how women with severe and enduring mental illness understood feelings of terror. Some of the research participants did not realise they had been abused and this affected the way they interpreted their own feelings. Others experienced fear based on their memories of past abuse and the images from that experience

were maintained, and reinforced fear of future violence and abuse. One of the unexpected outcomes of the research during which the histories of 31 women were recorded, was their appreciation that someone would spend hours listening to them for the first time.

Unfortunately, Professor Kristiansen did not have copies of her papers available for distribution at her presentation. However, if there is interest in obtaining information on her research contact should be made with the AASW WA Branch and a request will be made to Professor Kristiansen.

Photo 3

Branch Executive Officer, Meredith Doyle, catches up with Associate Professor Kristjana Kristiansen



Children in **Focus**

A professional development program for practitioners working with separating parents

Children in Focus is a long-awaited training forum for professionals involved with parents in their separation process, particularly in conflict management and resolution.

The forum brings children's best interests within the family law context to life, exploring a spectrum of child-focused through to child-inclusive practices in primary dispute resolution. **Children in Focus** is multi-faceted and will appeal to a broad spectrum of professions, including mediators, conciliators, family lawyers, psychologists, counsellors, and researchers.

A team of leading specialists in dispute resolution and developmental psychology has designed and will deliver this Program. They will be joined by expert consultant Dr. Joan Kelly to launch the Program in Melbourne in May. A tour of capital cities follows through to September this year.

Three distinct training forums will be provided, designed to build upon existing expertise in the field. These are the **Children in Focus Symposium** and two Workshops: **Parents in Conflict, Children in Focus** and **Child Inclusive Practices for Mediation and Counselling**.

By participating in the Program, AASW members would be able to accrue Continuing Professional Education points. Participants can attend part, or all, of the Program. Resource materials, follow-up support and supervision opportunities will also be available.

Development and delivery of the Program is subsidised by the Federal Attorney-General's Department.

Details about **Children in Focus** can be found at www.childreninfocus.org or by contacting Mary Caruana at the Australian Institute for Primary Care, 5th Floor, Health Sciences Building 2, La Trobe University 3086.
Telephone (03) 9479 3934 Fax (03) 9479 5977
Email cif@latrobe.edu.au

What the Branch Has Been Doing On Your Behalf In Social Policy

Submissions have now been completed to both the Gordon Inquiry and Children in Detention Inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Thank you very much to members who contributed to these submissions on behalf of the AASW/WA Branch.

I think the final products encompassed the main issues and concerns that the AASW/WA believe need to be addressed by the relevant authorities. If any members would like an electronic copy of either submission, please email me.

Chris Coopes and I met with Shawn Boyle (Director) and Leanne Barron (Social Policy Officer) from WACOSS. The aim of the meeting was to establish stronger working links between our organisations. WACOSS has a strong representation on government committees and a joint collaboration on identified social policy areas between them and the AASW/WA should prove to encourage a louder voice that government must respond to.

The AASW National Social Policy Committee has identified two frameworks that they will be working under - human rights /social justice and poverty/inequality. One of the areas the Committee will be addressing within this framework is child and family welfare. I hope to link this into our state social policy plan to ensure that both WA and National office are working in conjunction with each other.

My duty statement has also been included below. If anyone has any questions about it, please feel free to email me.

This month June 5th is World Environment Day (UN) and the 20th is World Refugee Day (UN).

KATHY BLITZ-COKIS, SOCIAL POLICY OFFICER

blitz-cokis@iinet.net.au

Description of Duties

1.1 Under the direction of the Vice President or Branch President, the social policy officer will prepare social policy submissions and responses regarding social policy matters. Where appropriate these will be done in conjunction with the various sub committees of the Branch or the Branch's Committee of Management (COM).

1.2 The Vice President for Social Policy or the Branch President can authorise the Social Policy Officer to work on particular issues for the particular sub-committee or the COM in order to assist the sub-committee or the COM or to undertake a project to improve overall functioning of the sub-committees.

1.3 Keeping aware of relevant social policy issues and instigating strategies to address by:

- reading newspaper and contact vice president or president regarding any particular issues that may be relevant;
- contact from any AASW member via email on any issues; and
- researching issues and drafting response letters to media or relevant agencies.

1.4 To develop a six monthly "Social Policy Strategic Plan" in conjunction with the President and Vice President.

1.5 To liaise with conveners of all regional Branch sub-committees and obtain comments on any issues relevant to social policy.

1.6 To automatically receive and read copies of the sub-committee minutes.

1.7 To attend sub-committee meetings as discussed with the Vice President.

General

1.8 Identify and compile list of social workers with expertise and knowledge as contacts to advise on specific areas.

1.9 Identify and make links with peak welfare and related organisations.

1.10 Develop ongoing liaison plan with WACOSS as the umbrella peak body for social justice issues.

1.11 Making and maintaining links with organisations/key people in research.

1.12 Compiling a summary of social policy issues that the AASW has addressed or researched for the monthly branch newsletter.

1.13 Compile a list of significant social justice days and weeks to assess relevance to social policy and how the branch can mesh in with these.

1.14 Liaise with the National Social Policy Officer concerning social policy matters in common or to develop a partnership between the branch and National office concerning social policy matters.

2. National Duties

2.1 Maintain ongoing contact with the AASW National Policy Officer.

2.2 Ensure copies of AASW media statements/letters are kept on record for WA branch.

2.3 Obtain a list of all AASW interest groups, working parties etc that are relevant for social policy and where the WA Branch

- has a representative on these working parties, to form and maintain contact regarding issues; and
- does not have a representative, to form and maintain contact with the convenor.

Outcomes

1. WA Branch

1.1 Type of assistance for sub-committees and regional sub-committees.

1.2 Timely response and support to submissions/responses .

1.3 Timely completion of letters/media documents.

1.4 Completion and conduction of six monthly Social Policy Strategic Plan.

1.5 Attendance at sub-committee meetings or combined meetings.

1.6 Assistance given to delegations to ministers/shadow ministers and CEO's.

1.7 Monthly report to Committee of Management.

1.8 Six monthly progress report to Committee of Management and National office.

1.9 Assistance provided to Vice President.

2. National

2.1 Establishment of ongoing working relationship with AASW national policy officer.

2.2 Establish and maintain ongoing links with national working parties and national interest groups as appropriate.

2.3 Compile a reference of national letters/media statements/submissions for the Branch.

2.5 Timely responses to National office requested by National Policy Officer.

THE PAUL CULLEN HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Recognition for unsung Australians working for refugees

To celebrate AUSTCARE Refugee Week each year in October AUSTCARE honours local and largely unsung heroes who work for refugees in Australia through the Paul Cullen Humanitarian Awards.

The Awards also serve to raise public awareness of the issues facing refugees in our society, and honour the lifetime's work for refugees of AUSTCARE's founding President, Major-General Paul Cullen AC CBE DSO ED (Rtd).

These awards are presented in two categories – individuals and community groups. Anyone can nominate an individual or community group working to advance the interest and well-being of refugees.

Nominations for the 2002 Awards close on Friday August 9 2002. The Awards will be presented during AUSTCARE Refugee Week at the President's Dinner at Parliament House, Sydney on 10 October 2002.

If you would like to make a nomination, please contact Jo Dunlop, Marketing and Fundraising Co-ordinator, telephone (02) 9565 9114, email jdunlop@austcare.org.au

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK, 6-12 OCTOBER

Small grants program to hold mental health week events

Non profit community based organisations are invited to apply for funds to hold Mental Health Week events, from the Community Health Promotion Strategy (CMHPS) Small Grants Program.

Willingness to explore issues relating to the 2002 World Mental Health Day theme – "The effects of trauma on children" will be highly regarded. Information about the WA Mental Health Week Theme will be available after 11th May 2002.

The aim of the CMHPS Grants Program is to facilitate involvement in Mental Health Week to promote the objectives of Mental Health Week 2002. Schools can hold their events in the week leading up to Mental Health Week.

Partnerships between agencies are encouraged. Amounts of up to \$1,000 for collaborative (two or more agencies) events and up to \$500 for single agency events are available. These amounts will vary according to the scope of the project.

Funding applications close Friday 28 June 2002. Inquiries to WA Association for Mental Health. Ph: 9420 7277. Email: waamh@waamh.org.au