



NEW MYTHS FOR OLD

He was pushing a rather shabby old bicycle when I first saw him in the main street. There was a heavy two sided saddle bag swung over the rear wheel. As he came closer I could hear him calling out "New myths for old. Top prices paid for old ones. New ones on special."

Intrigued, I walked over to intercept him as he came closer. I asked him just what it was he was buying and selling.

"Top prices for old myths and specials on new ones" he replied.

"But what exactly is this product? I'm not sure what a 'myth' is."

"It's an example you'll be needing" he said and went on, "Take this new one for example." As he pulled out a plastic covered folder. "This one says that children don't tell lies."

Surprised, I said "Surely they do. Why I know my kids do. What are you on about?"

"Nah" he said, "that's the old myth. See here.." pulling a tattered folder from the other side of the saddle bag "got this one from a counsellor down the street. He'd heard about the research which showed children don't lie about important things like sexual abuse so he traded in his old belief that kids lie. Got himself a brand new one for just a hundred bucks!"

"What! A hundred dollars?" incredulous said I. "That's right. Now he's got the latest model and it keeps him up to date. Important for accreditation you know. He wants to be up with the latest and as a counsellor he needs to know about children. So now he's OK and can keep his 'approved by government' sign up over his door."

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

"But the new one is called a myth too?" I asked. "of course it is" he replied. "They are all myths you know. But you gotta have the new one or you could lose your status."

"What other ones have you got?" I asked.

"Looking for something special? Well I got ones on 'domestic violence', 'research', 'marketing' and heaps of others. Any preferences?"

"What about the domestic violence one?" I asked. "Oh that" he said "It's a really good seller. Well marketed you know. Old one is a bit confused you know. Got two sides to it. One side is that wives don't get banged around by their old man and the other side is they do but deserve it .. ask for it you know."

"And the new one?" I asked

"Oh that's that most women do cop it and they never do anything to provoke it."

"Do women ever thump men?" I asked. "No way" he replied "That's not a saleable myth sorry. Why, did you want one? I could ask if there's one at the design stage."

"Not really. Let me think about it. I suppose it would be expensive?"

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“Of course the newly developed models have a premium price, particularly if they get to be popular. I got ones on cooperation and collaboration if you’re interested.”

“What’s new there?” I asked. He replied “Well, the old myth was that competition was good for the community.”

“Well, isn’t it?” I said. “Hey, you keep missing the point. It’s not what’s true, silly. It’s about what can be sold. I dunno really. Maybe competition is good. Who cares. I don’t. But it’s cooperation and collaboration that’s coming in now in a big way. You really must buy one of these. I’ll give you a good price on your old competition stuff.”

“No? Not interested in that one? Well how about this one. Should interest you ‘cos you’re a man. Old myth was that men got a better deal than women. New one is they get the worst end of the stick every time – especially in the Family Court thing. I can’t trade the old myth on this one though ‘cos you really need both.”

“That would make it complicated wouldn’t it?” I observed. “Not really, just depends what you’re submitting for. If it’s for a men’s service you use the new one – we’d rather call it type two and if you are going for something for women then you use type one. Quite easy when you get the hang of it”

I must have looked a bit puzzled and he went on. “Look, unless you can talk like the current myth and know when to use it you’ll get no joy from the purchasers of services – oops sorry, that’s a word from the old competition myth. I mean from the funding bodies. It’s not a matter of what you think works best or the way anything should be done. It’s about making submissions that fit with the current myth. You really need to subscribe to my service so you can keep up to date. They keep changing you know.”

“What keeps changing? The names of the departments?”

“Oh that too but I mean the way they think at any one time. Look there’s another you really must get.” “What’s that?” I asked?”

“The research myth. When you want to get a grant you need to have some research findings to support your argument. In this myth you will learn how to get the results you want.” “Oh, how’s that? I thought research was pretty solid stuff” I commented.

“Really you are naive aren’t you! Look, if you want to follow the research myth then what you do is first decide what you want to prove. Then you set up a study and if it

doesn’t work out you do it again. Maybe need to do it 20 times and then ... bingo! ... you got it. Then you can say all that tests of significance stuff and prove that it’s significant at the .05 level whatever that means.”

“Oh that” I replied “means that the chance of the results occurring purely due to chance factors is less than one in 20. But if you had to do it 20 times before you got the result you wanted then it simply isn’t valid and any first year student can tell you that.”

“Ah ha! Only if you tell them about the other 19 times” he said. “course, you don’t let on about them – only the one that worked!”

“But that’s dishonest” I retorted. “So” he said “ Where did you come from? Say I’ve got a great new myth on ethics if you’d like me to tell you about it.”

“No thanks. I don’t think so” “OK”. He said “What about trading in your old confidentiality myth for the latest duty of care one?”

Just then an ice cream van playing Green Sleeves came around the corner. He waved and said “That’s my brother we share the business - someday I do the ice cream.”

“Do you like your job?” I asked.

“Love it. Get to meet all sorts of people. Service is what it’s all about I just love helping people.”

“Which one?” I asked “ makes the most money? Ice cream or myths?”

“Myths of course but I prefer the smiles on the kiddies faces when I offer them a cone,” he said a bit wearily and then recovering his sales pitch went on “Hey. It’s not what is but what you believe is as what counts.”

“ Getting back to the point” I said “Can’t we ever escape these myths?”

“ Not if you want things to be simple and keep getting paid. Dealing with what really is real is complicated you know. Why everyone is different. How can you handle that. So much easier to have a set of expectations and just go with them.”

“But what about the client?” I asked. He came back with “No problem. They can just shop around until they find someone with a collaborative myth!”

“I’m getting a bit confused” I said. “That’s just my point” he replied “If you buy the latest myth there’s an end to confusion. You just follow it. Easy. Hey! Tell you what.

You really gotta have this one. Brand new, just off the press. Got a special price on it 'cos they keep changing this one. Latest is that children reared in 'broken homes' don't do as well as those from the other sort of families. Really cheap price on this one 'cos we just recycled one of the old ones that's come back in fashion. Let you have it for fifty bucks. Yer can't do better'n that."

"I'm even more confused now than when we started" I moaned. Then I could see he was getting frustrated and right then the ice cream cart pulled up alongside. "Hey" Said the driver "Wanna a cream cone with chockie topping?"

"Yes please" I said.

Many thanks to Joe Goerke for this wonderful piece.

INVESTING IN KIDS

An international researcher has warned that countries with a high standard of living will be forced to confront increasing levels of alienation, apathy, rebellion, delinquency and violence among young people as the 'cost of progress' unless greater economic resources are allocated for children's development, welfare and wellbeing.

Speaking as part of the NSW Commission for Children & Young People's *Focus on the Early Years* seminar series, Professor Daniel Keating said if you want your society to progress you need to support child development.

Professor Keating, who has written extensively on human development, developmental health and education, said research has established a strong association between overall health of a population and the size of the 'social distance' between its members. The statistics indicate a higher overall level of health and wellbeing in societies where 'social differences' are less pronounced.

According to Professor Keating, societies that experience rapid technological and social change also risk a great decline in the social support systems that traditionally nurtured the developmental needs of all its members. His concern echoes earlier predictions that the 'forces of disarray, increasingly being generated in the larger society are producing growing chaos in the lives of children and youth'.

"Although economically poor families are at the highest risk, the changes are so widespread that negative consequences are occurring even for the children of families that are moderately secure economically," said Professor Keating.

Professor Keating is Atkinson Professor of Early Childhood Development and Education Fellow at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and Director of its Human Development Program at the University of Toronto. He is also author of *Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations*.

The full version of Professor Keating's presentation to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People is available at

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gi/commits>.

Previously published in Exchange, Issue 10, Winter 2002 (newsletter of NSW Commission for Children & Young People.

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

This month there are several submissions and issues that have been raised and that the WA Branch have been and will be involved with providing feedback.

The *Mental Health Act 1996* and the *Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Defendants) Act 1996* are being reviewed. The terms of reference for this review are basically exploring the "operation and effectiveness" of each piece of legislation. The Mental Health Subcommittee are providing input and if anyone else would like a copy of the terms of reference and specific sections of the *Acts* being reviewed, just email me.

As people may be aware, the Office of Children and Young People's Policy have been conducting community forums and asking the community "What's important to children and young people?" and "What changes would people like to see?"

The WA Branch will have an opportunity to provide some feedback on these questions in the near future. One of the ideas that is being raised regularly is a "Commissioner" for children and young people. We recently completed a submission to the ALP about this and anticipate sharing some of the ideas with the state Office of Children and Young People soon.

Some members may have noticed the newspaper coverage of child protection issues during child protection week. Chris Coopes, Vice President for Social Policy, Barbara Meddin - (President) and Carole Kagi (NAPCAN) facilitated the media contacts and planning of the articles. Future work on child protection issues may include linking in with WACOSS.

The Department of Health have requested input from the Branch on a discussion paper addressing *Rehabilitation services in WA*. The Department have developed a model of rehabilitation service and are seeking feedback on the strengths and difficulties of the proposed system.

Finally, the WA Equal Opportunity Commission will be conducting a review of public housing and Aboriginal people in the state. The Commission is finalising the terms of reference which we are providing feedback on and will then await a deadline for submissions. Lastly, important dates in October:

International Day of Older People (1st),
Lone Parent Week (13th-21st),
Proclamation Day (21st),
United Nations Day (24th),
Children's Week (19th - 27th),
Universal Children's Day (27th),
Grandparent's Day (27th) and
National Family Day (27th).

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ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

Aboriginal reconciliation is an AASW priority and one of the reasons for the establishment last year of a national AASW Reconciliation and Indigenous Issues working party.

The WA Branch has also made this a priority and earlier this year the Branch became a corporate member of Reconciliation WA.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation first met in 1992 to build bridges for a better understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider Australian community. The Council was established by the federal parliament and has 25 members.....12 Aboriginal, 2 Torres Strait Islander and 11 from the wider Australian community. The Council's vision is "A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all."

The Council has established a network of reconciliation coordinators in all states and territories.

The Council believes that eight issues are an essential part of the reconciliation process. The following is taken from the Council's reconciliation brochure.

Understanding country

The importance of land and sea in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.

Improving relationships

Improving relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.

Valuing cultures

Australia has many cultures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are special because their values are those of Australia's first peoples.

Sharing history

The history of Australia began long before the arrival of Captain Cook in 1770. It started with Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples...a history for all Australians to learn and share.

Addressing disadvantage

Statistics show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the poorest, unhealthiest, least employed, worst housed and most imprisoned Australians.

Custody levels

The rate of imprisonment of indigenous Australians is 29 times greater than that of the wider community.

Destiny

Greater opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to control their own destinies.

Formal agreement

Agreement on whether the process of reconciliation would be advanced by a document or documents of reconciliation

Reconciliation(WA) has 18 Committee members, some of whom have organisational affiliations. The office bearers are:

Chair	Ian Viner
Vice Chair	Spencer Riley
Treasurer	Harry Sorenson
Secretary	Marie Taylor

There will be more information on this important issue in future newsletters.

CHRISTOPHER COOPES

VICE PRESIDENT (SOCIAL POLICY)

2001/2002 ANNUAL REPORT

This year the Branch has decided to publish the Annual report on the Branch website. This will save the branch printing costs and help the environment. In past years the report has been distributed to each member.

This year the report can be accessed on the Branch website at

<http://westausaasw.highway1.com.au/>

Members who would like a printed copy are welcome to contact the Branch Executive Officer, Meredith Doyle on 9420 7240 for a copy of the report to be sent out to them.

The Inaugural Megan Sassi Memorial Lecture

Presented by West Australians for Racial Equality in partnership with the Office of Multicultural Interests and Library Services will commemorate the life of the prominent WA human rights activist.

**WHY SHEEP WON'T CROSS BRIDGES - THE
POLITICS OF FEAR**

**BY ACTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSIONER
MOIRA RAYNER**

5.30 for 6.00 pm, 11 November 2002

Alexander Library Theatre

Free light refreshments will be served.

GRACE VAUGHAN AWARD 2003

In 1984, friends and colleagues of the late Grace Vaughan provided a sum of money to establish an award to be offered annually to individuals wishing to pursue studies in the area of social justice and human rights at UWA, or individuals with a demonstrated scholarly or professional concern for social justice and human rights wishing to travel in Australia or overseas for further studies likely to benefit the community.

Previously, the award has been given to candidates to assist with:

- travel and accommodation costs associated with presenting a paper on her research on familicide, custody and access at the Melbourne conference on family law;

- travel and publication costs associated with research for and publication of her work on the experiences of families who have lost someone through murder; and
- travel to Geneva to attend the International Service for Human Rights Geneva Training Course and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, to enhance understanding of human rights law and activism.

The award for 2003 will be \$2000. The closing date for applications is 29 November 2002.

Interested applicants or those requiring further information should contact the Faculty Administrative Officer (Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences) at UWA on (08) 9380 2096 or visit the website: www.arts.uwa.edu.au/gracevaughan/