

WA SOCIAL WORK NEWS

February 2004

STATE CONFERENCE UPDATE

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Thought for the Day

Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present.

Marcus Aurelius Antonius (121 AD - 180 AD), Meditations

Online Version

An online version of the newsletter can be found at

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

BUILDING OUR PLACE: RELATIONSHIPS, PARTNERSHIPS COMMUNITIES

INAUGURAL WA SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE, 4-5 MAY 2004

The Society is pleased to announce that planning has commenced for the inaugural WA Social Work Conference. This will be a one and a half day event which will coincide with Social Work Day, which will occur on Wednesday 5 May 2004. Plan to attend this vital, new social work event that will develop, challenge and celebrate social workers in Western Australia. Further details about the program will be available soon from the SPSW website.

The conference will be held at the Wollaston Conference Centre. Further Information from Karen Vincent Karen.Vincent@wacsso.wa.edu.au or Cindy Gorton jonandcindy@bigpond.com.

UN DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS - 40 YEARS ON

This day fifteen years ago, I was putting the last touches to a media and advertising campaign to mark the UN Declaration of Human Rights 40th birthday combining international and local elements to celebrate Australia's role in promoting and adopting this historic call for a free, fair and just world. The 1980s, under the leadership of people like Marcus Einfeld, Brian Burdekin, Irene Moss, Quentin Bryce, Roma Mitchell, Lionel Bowen and Chris Sidoti, was a time when many of us hoped that international human rights standards would help us make lasting changes to the protection of Australians human rights.

Reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, homeless children, the mentally ill, protection from discrimination for people with disabilities, maternity leave, native title and addressing the stolen generations these all flowed from Parliamentary, Government and community action to work towards standards set in international law.

Jesse Street and Bert Evatt are often pointed to as Australians involved in the development of international human rights in response to the horrors of the Second World War, but many other Australians have also been engaged over the years. When I went to my first UN General Assembly, I was really taken with the regard delegates from seriously disadvantaged nations had for Australia.

Our championship of international efforts to overcome human rights abuses was sorely needed and tremendously appreciated. In many ways, it is enlightened self-interest for Australians to support international human rights law - our Constitutional forefathers left us without the protections enjoyed in the

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Evening Forum

Wednesday 18 February 2004

Niche Lotteries Lotteries House, 11 Aberdare Road, Nedlands. 5.30 drinks, 6.30 presentation, 7.30 informal networking

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LETTERS

Brian Wooller
President, SPSW (Inc)

Greetings Mr Brian Wooller

As President/Director of the Victorian Branch of AASW, I along with our Committee of Management have been following the progress of your organisation with interest. And from what we are seeing and hearing, it appears that you are providing a very valuable service to the field of social work in Western Australia.

Our CoM were very keen that I write to you and acknowledge the pain and grief we believe your members experienced at the "hands of the AASW Nationally". Many of the issues that you were raising leading up to the "split" were certainly questions that the Victorian members were pondering also.

We were all very shocked and saddened by the resignation of the WA CoM. Our concern was not exclusive to, but included a fear that it was endemic of the whole of the AASW. Your collective yet unified actions sent shock waves throughout the entire association. It's such a shame that the situation got to the point it did, before people sat up and took notice, and action.

However, what has come to pass, has come to pass. I'm a fan of Harry Potter, and so I have to liken it to the story of the Phoenix. out of the ashes raises something yet again beautiful. I hope that in the future, the Society of Professional Social Workers and the AASW will find a way to work together.

As you are probably aware, there have been some rather dramatic and timely changes to the AASW.

The National President has resigned, as has the CEO. There are a number of newer Directors on the Board who are committed to addressing the issues that have nearly been the down fall of the association. They are committed to open and honest dialogue with the Branches (with the view that the Branches will stay), and are committed to practices that are transparent, respectful and inclusive.

I wish you and your organisation well.

Yours sincerely

Peter Richardson
President/Director
AASW (Vic Branch)

7 February 2004

Peter Richardson
President/Director
AASW (Vic Branch)

Dear Peter

Thank you for your kind email. The WA Branch Committee of Management resigned after a long battle to maintain their autonomy and control over their business and their resources. They also had concern about the deficit budgeting approach of the Board.

There is little doubt from the viewpoint of those of us involved in the new group (Society of Professional Social Workers) that while the AASW is constituted as a company little will be done to ensure the autonomy of Branches. The company has in recent time been the reason why there has been increased central control. Directors over a number of years have been told that they act for "the company" and not for the branch.

The time has come for us to re-examine what strictures serve the profession best. The AASW became a company because at the time that was the only legal option open to it. Agreements were entered into to allow branches to maintain their autonomy. These were eroded by the Board. Once a National CEO was appointed this further centralised the organisation.

It is now possible to once again look at State incorporation. Each State has its own statute and it is a simple process. This is consistent with the way Australia is governed and would overcome some of the practical difficulties with things like registration which can only be done on a State by State basis.

It is also important to remember that this was the preferred option at the time of the formation of the company. WA and SA were both incorporated bodies in their respective States. They gave up their incorporation to form the company. This was forced on the AASW by the stand taken by the then Fed-

eral Attorney General who would not allow incorporation of the AASW under the then ACT Ordinance (they did not at that stage have self government).

While knowing little of Harry Potter, I do agree that there can be new beginnings. This is why we have taken the position of establishing a new organisation under the Incorporations law in WA. For the AASW to reconstitute in a new form more appropriate to our profession may be impossible.

It is sad that we have all been put to the "bother" but what was happening was destructive and punishing, particularly to the hardy souls on the WA Branch Committee of Management.

The Phoenix only arose with renewed youth after it burnt itself on the funeral pile. This allowed it to live through a new cycle. I am not sure that being unique as it was adds much to the analogy.

Lets all hope for renewed vigour so that we can all get on with doing the important things for our profession and with our colleagues.

Brian Wooller
9 February 2004

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United States and now in Europe and Canada.

The last few years have been a bumpy ride for those of us in Australia concerned with human rights. A seemingly minor blemish, the acceptance by the Federal Government in the early nineties of immigration official's arguments that asylum seekers aren't covered by international human rights standards, has turned into a cancer that has spread throughout our body politic. The bi-partisan Parliamentary approach to reconciliation was poisoned like the waterholes of old. Australia now runs off shore detention camps where children who have sought to escape terror regimes are detained indefinitely. The right to liberty, the rights of children to care and nurture, the rights to health care, fair judicial process, of family unity - all are routinely denied by officials who are

Bookcaffè

Is it me or my hormones? Women in transition

You are invited to hear gynaecologist Dr Margaret Smith and psychotherapist Patricia Michalka talk about their book. *Is it me or my hormones? Women in transition*. Margaret and Patricia will talk on the question most often asked by women going through their middle years (age 35 to 55) who are experiencing physical and emotional changes, "Is it me or my hormones?"

The book is highly readable and offers practical help with humour and compassion. This special event is free, but bookings are essential. At Bookcaffè, 137 Claremont Cres, Swanbourne, Thursday 26 February 6.00 pm - 7.30 pm. RSVP: Tel: 9385 0553 or email: goodbooks@bookcaffè.com.au.

able to peck thousands of words out of their Canberra computers to pretend that it's all not happening, or that it's all just fine, or it's all someone else's fault.

Close to nine thousand people who'd flown into Australia last year sought refugee status here, and lived in the community while nine out of ten of them were rejected. In contrast, the nine and a half thousand people who arrived in the last five years by boat lived in detention centres until nine out of ten of them were recognised as refugees.

Yet the Government still manages to play with our great fear of boat people, using the race card to trump the idea of a fair go. And to trump any common sense about waste and inefficiency!

The good news is the long-standing commitment of Australians to human rights has brought thousands into action. There is a sizeable and significant group of Australians who regularly put their hands up for human rights as members or patrons of organisations and supporters at events - petitioners and parishioners,

students and teachers, doctors and lawyers and, quite literally, butchers and bakers and candle stick makers.

In just two years, A Just Australia has grown from an urgent idea to an organisation with 10,000 active supporters. These people reflect Australian ideas and ideals - about the battler, a fair go, mateship and so on. Their vision and spirit of human rights is slightly sun-burnt and roughed up by their no-bull, down-to-earth, 'rather do it than talk about it' attitude. They have stuck it out, and grow stronger, despite the Machiavellian grey suits that patrol the corridors of power.

HOWARD GLENN

Text of talk broadcast 12 January 2004 on ABC Radio National's Perspective program. Howard Glenn Howard Glenn is National Director of A Just Australia and previously worked in parliament and government in areas of indigenous affairs and the Australia Day committee.

Catch 22

There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind ...

Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. (Ch 5)

Some men are born mediocre, some men achieve mediocrity, and some men have mediocrity thrust upon them. With Major Major it had been all three. (Ch 9)

Catch 22 (1961), by Joseph Heller,

How To Join

Applications for membership of the Society are now invited. Go to the website, click on the *membership page* and download an application form.

If you are a current or recent member of the AASW, enclose a copy of your membership. Otherwise you will need to enclose a copy of your qualifications as outlined in the form.

Payment of fees is by two methods: annual fee (\$297) or by monthly direct debit (\$29.75).

EVENING SEMINAR TUESDAY 2 MARCH 2004 INSPECTING PRISONS & OTHER CUSTODIAL SERVICES: REVIEWING THE FIRST THREE YEARS & SCANNING THE FUTURE

This seminar will be presented by Professor Richard Harding on Tuesday 2 March 2004, 7.30 pm, Niche Lotteries House, Hospital Ave, Nedlands (cnr Hospital Ave & Aberdare Rd, near St John Ambulance depot)

In the 2002/2003 Annual Report of the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) there is a helpful description of the evolution of the goals of the Service. As noted in this report, the inspection standards of the Office have increasingly revolved around the new operational philosophy of the Department of Justice, developed for the purpose of specifying the scope and standards of prison services that would be expected of a private prison operator and thus enshrined in the Request for Proposals document for Acacia prison tenders.

This philosophy attempts to balance the "four cornerstones" of custody, care and well-being, reparation and rehabilitation. These are, of course, only achievable if the resources and systems are adequate to support these objectives - so that these issues become in a sense a fifth cornerstone or at any rate a crucial mechanism.

What the Office looks for in its inspections is an appropriate balance according to the role of the particular prison. As the Department of Justice progressively develops a profile for its prisons, this approach becomes more tangible in its application. Thus, expectations of a reintegration or releasing prison, such as Karnet or Wooroloo, would be different in terms of both their custodial arrangements and their reparation and rehabilitation arrangements than, say, our expectations of a maximum-security prison such as Casuarina, where custodial arrangements and care and well-being should receive a greater weight.

The approach of the Office has been twofold: to evaluate whether services falling within each of the four cornerstones are delivered to an appropriate standard and are properly supported by available resources and systems and to assess whether the balance between the cornerstones is appropriate for the particular prison. This comes through

in each of the published reports to date, which are available from OICS's website: www.custodialinspector.wa.gov.au.

There appears to be an evolving international consensus that broad factors such as these should be taken into account when evaluating a prison's performance. The UK Chief Inspector of Prisons has led the way with the "healthy prison test" - (a) that the weakest prisoners should feel safe, (b) that all prisoners are treated with respect, (c) that the prison regime be purposeful, and (d) that there be preparation for release. The further reference to the need for staff to be respected is shorthand for ensuring that resources and systems are appropriate to achieve a healthy prison.

Correctional Service Canada has identified its strategic outcomes in similar terms: care, custody, reintegration and corporate management. "Care" focuses on a safe environment for those living and working in the prison system, "custody" emphasises safe, secure, humane accommodation and management systems and regimes, "reintegration" takes in the notion that both work (reparation) and programs (rehabilitation) assist in the preparation for release; and "corporate management" encompasses the notions expressed in Western Australia by the notion of resources and systems.

In practical terms, therefore, the criteria in these two other jurisdictions, when given detailed substance, overlap closely with those of the Western Australian "new operational philosophy." In inspecting against these standards, the OICS is very much in the mainstream.

The necessary extension of this approach is that overall management systems inevitably become a matter of interest and concern. If the resources and systems are not available to permit an appropriate balance for a particular prison to be achieved, the likelihood is that this goes back to central management decision-making and resource allocation.