



WA Social Work E-News

In the Loop

Autumn 2014

As we approach World Social Work Day on the 18th of March you are encouraged to join with social workers all over the world to celebrate World Social Work Day. This year's Global Agenda's theme is ***Social and Economic Crisis-Social Work Solutions***.

This focus is important on both a global and a local level. While Australia has the reputation of being an egalitarian society it appears that in the 21st century the economic and social disparities are becoming greater and greater. Our governments are providing negative leadership in their appalling treatment of asylum seekers, their continued introduction of mandatory sentencing laws and tax systems that support multi-national companies at the expense of the population and the environment. Medicare as a universal health system is under threat and homelessness is becoming commonplace. Little is being done to address the inequitous situation of our indigenous people and our system of social security appears to be under constant "review", which generally seems to mean less rather than more for those who need it most. In WA the discrepancies between those engaged in the mining industry and the rest of the population continue to widen with prices aimed at those who are, leaving the rest often without the capacity to afford basic necessities. As social workers we need to be active and visible in standing up for our values and pointing to solutions. World Social Work Day is a great opportunity to do this. Wishing you a happy and productive World Social Work Day! (editor)

how we should structure and govern the Society; looked carefully at the most pressing issues facing us and considered the most suitable methods of achieving these. Several developments emanated from that workshop, which included the establishment of an Executive Officer position (and the recruiting of someone to it); the reviewing of our Constitution to ensure it meets the needs of the Society; as well as developing a membership recruiting and retention plan. Some of these issues remain a "work in progress", but those below have begun.

The Establishment of an Executive Officer

An exciting new development is the establishment of an Executive Officer position, which will be on a part-time basis. The duties of the position will primarily be to provide the daily administrative support and management of the Society, thereby supporting the Executive, Board and Sub-committees of the Society. It should mean an earlier response to queries and a more efficient administration of the Society's affairs.

The position was advertised and six applications were received. The Selection Panel ranked and interviewed five applicants, from which one was offered the position. Unfortunately, she withdrew her application at the time of appointment. In the interim, Christina Askew, recently our Acting Secretary, has been appointed to the Executive Officer position for a period of six weeks, in order to get the position and processes established as soon as possible. Christina commenced on Monday 10th March 2014 and will work thirty hours per week for the first four weeks, followed by two weeks at 15 hours. During that time, the position will be re-advertised.

Christina can be contacted on 0411 591 265. The email contact details will be provided to

President's Report

Greetings Members,

The Board held a workshop on the 31st October 2013 and established how we wanted to work;

members by separate email.
Welcome aboard Christina!

The Return of Our Secretary

Cindy Gorton has been on leave from her position for approximately three months to attend to some family matters, but has now returned to her position. The Secretary and Executive Office will work closely with each other.

Welcome back Cindy!

Continuing Professional Education

The development of this programme for 2014 is well underway, thanks to the efforts of the CPE sub-committee. Some of the details appear elsewhere in this newsletter, with others being circulated to members at a later date.

The Constitution

Our Constitution is currently under review; for the purpose of bringing it up to date, as well as to support our new structure and governance arrangements. The Board is yet to consider all of the details, but once that occurs, the details will be circulated to members prior to a Special General Meeting being held to adopt the changes.

Elder Abuse Working Party

A working group, under the leadership of Chris Coopes, has been established to consider this issue carefully and develop a plan for the SPSW to lobby the Commonwealth Government. The Board recently approved the terms of reference and membership of the Working Party, but if any other member would like to participate, please contact Chris Coopes on ccoopes@bigpond.net.au More details will be provided later, once the Board has established a clear policy on the issue.

Brian J. Dodds
PRESIDENT

Board Member Profile

This edition's Board Member in profile is our amazingly tireless Vice President Dr Barbara

Meddin, who hardly requires an introduction. Barbara always wanted to be a Social Worker but didn't know what it was called. Barbara comes to us from the United States where she studied sociology and psychology at college before locating a Social Work programme at university. She was frustrated on emigrating to Australia to find how little social workers were valued here compared to their counterparts in the US. She feels that this is due to Social Work not being a registered profession in Australia, which it should be due to the highly complex and sensitive type of work that we do. On her road to Social Work Barbara did many unusual and interesting things, including being a weather girl on a Country and Western radio station and even looking after visiting Country and Western stars. She also played violin in a symphony orchestra, following in the footsteps of her grandfather who was a concert violinist. Barbara completed her PHD in the field of child protection but was also concerned about the abuse of the elderly. She set up the first adult day care centre in Kentucky for elderly people at risk of abuse. She also set up a world first programme for parents who needed to be better parents. To engage them she offered to do something for them first. Imagine her surprise when the group requested that she teach them aerobics! In Georgia she taught police officers more appropriate ways to deal with domestic violence situations by diffusing the situation first. She did such a great job that they insisted that she go in first to the next DV incident. She must have done well as the man had a gun and Barbara survived to tell the tale. Barbara appears to have worked in most fields of social work including Juvenile justice; economic (social) security; health services; foster care; hospital emergency and urology departments and universities. However, it was her expertise in the child abuse field that brought her to Australia. She was invited to come here and train social workers about child protection and loved it so much that she decided to migrate.

Barbara says that now that there are so few positions tagged as social work positions we need to accept that we no longer have such positions and concentrate on demonstrating that what we bring is very valuable. We must always use and illuminate our social work skills

as many people believe that they can do what we do and fail to understand what it is that we offer. Unfortunately those people that do it poorly are remembered more often than those who do it well and so it is essential that social workers receive good supervision in order that they can do it well and that programmes are reviewed so that the difference can be seen. It is also unfortunate that there are many people working in human services that don't have the requisite skills and fail to understand the inherent risks. Social Workers are bound by a code of ethics that underpins our practice and this is primarily what makes the difference.

Barbara has always been involved in a professional organisation. She believes that it is important to stand up for professional governance issues and is passionate about continuing professional education (CPE). She feels that it is essential to provide social workers with top quality education at reasonable prices, especially as many individuals these days have to pay for their training themselves. She does this by using good business skills and searching out free resources.

Barbara was a national director with the AASW at the time of the split. She and others in the WA Branch saw that things were not going well and the founding members of the SPSW felt that this was the only ethical thing to do. Barbara and her colleagues then set up an organisation that was WA based and provided social workers and other human services workers that was well- managed and offered high quality CPE.

Barbara says that what inspires and keeps her going is that she just loves making a difference in people's lives – families, children and individuals. Also, as a profession we support one another and contribute to developing each other's skills. Being on the side of right is also very important – keeping children safe, helping a victim of domestic violence make the right decision for herself and her children is very rewarding work.

While Barbara has been in the profession a long time she can't think of a better profession and hopes to be doing it for many more years, marketing the wisdom that comes with her

experience. She intends to continue with her consultancy business which gives her the flexibility to support her own family and provides lots of opportunities and variety in what she does and still loves to do.

As far as the SPSW is concerned, Barbara sees a need to increase the membership base and be pro-active about that. She wants the Society to be a strong voice to advocate for policy standards in the social work arena and to demonstrate what social work does. She sees that we need to advocate for people who do not have a voice such as those elderly people suffering abuse and sees a role in making submissions to organisations and Royal Commissions on behalf of members. Finally, of course, she wants to continue to offer top quality, affordable workshops for members.

Continuing Professional Education Committee Report

CPE for 2014

2014 promises to be a great year for Continuing Education brought to you by SPSW. We are currently in the early stages of planning a range of workshops and forums.

Friday, 21st March 2014.

Quickly, Immediately, Effectively - *Understand, manage and build relationships with Challenging Individuals*. Presented by David Szczecinski (BSW, MAASW, Adv Acc) This workshop accrues 11 SPSW CPE points and has been a completely oversubscribed.

Wednesday April 16th

Understanding and Working with Young People who Self-Harm- skills for human service professionals. This workshop presented by Youth Link is already heavily subscribed. Please contact the Executive Officer for details and registration form at eo@spsw.net.au .

Also planned are workshops on vicarious trauma, on July 4th a workshop on Mindfulness, in Sept our highly successful supervision workshop with several others in the pipeline on topics such as Domestic Violence, Working with Men and more vital topics.

SPSW will also bring you three forums this calendar year.

Wednesday May 14th (TBC)- presented by Judge Robert Cock chairman of the Prisoners' Review Board.

Have some spare time – why not consider joining the CPE committee. See the add below for details.

Dr. Barbara Meddin, Chair
Continuing Education Committee

Want to Help plan SPSW's CPE Program?

Are you interested in continuing professional education?

Would you like to help SPSW plan its low cost top quality monthly CPE workshops and forums?

If you answer yes to these, then why not join SPSW's CPE committee. We meet once a month on a Wednesday at 6:30pm to plan coming adverts.

For more information, please contact Barbara Meddin, CPE Committee Chair on 041 795 9058 or waybob@bekkers.com.au

Look forward to hearing from you.

SPSW Elder Abuse Working Party

As a result of a suggestion by our Vice President, Barbara Meddin, the SPSW agreed to set up a working party to examine the issue of elder abuse. Barbara Meddin, who has portfolio responsibility for the area and Chris Coopes, who will convene the working party, have drawn up the Terms of Reference. These were endorsed by the SPSW Board at their March meeting.

The agreed Terms of Reference are :-

- 1) To canvas the issues of elder protection in WA.
- 2) To identify the current services and protection systems in WA in respect to elder protection.
- 3) To prepare a submission to government on behalf of the Society of Professional Social Workers as to whether there is a need for elder protection legislation and establishment of a dedicated elder protection agency similar to the concept of a child protection agency.

So far there are three members of the group (apart from Barbara and Chris) and if there are any SPSW members with experience / strong interest in this issue, they would be welcome to join.

Chris will be convening the initial meeting of the working party in April 2014.

Chris Coopes (convenor)

Don't forget that your membership entitles you to great deals with



Making a Difference

This edition features a local initiative that is making a genuine difference to families' lives instead of looking to overseas news for inspiration.

Parent Voice Project

The Family Inclusion Network of Western Australia Inc. (Fin WA) advocates for, and supports parents and family members who have children in the out of home care system, or who are at risk of going into the care system.

Fin WA's mission is *'to have a child protection system that is respectful and inclusive of parents, family and community as key stakeholders'*.

Strategically Fin WA seeks to:

- Empower parents and families to participate meaningfully in the child protection system;
- Foster a collaborative and inclusive child protection system;
- Promote the valuable role and intrinsic value of parents and families within the child protection system and
- Promote and sustain a viable, effective organisation based on best practice.

On very limited resources Fin WA provides a service delivery to families with one to one case work, group work and education and training workshops for families and service providers. Frequently, parents tell us they feel unheard and disregarded within a complex bureaucratic and

legalistic system. For that reason in mid-2013 a project entitled *'The Parent Voice Project'* was developed to give parents the opportunity to tell their experiences of being involuntary participants in the child protection system using photography as a medium of expression.

The objectives were to:

- Provide a channel for parents to share their experiences of child protection intervention through a creative medium;
- Empower parents to tell their story and have their voice heard;
- Build community awareness of the lived experience of parents with children in care.

For parents it is important that the broader community, and those working within the sector, hear a different discourse than that of parents as 'bad'. Generally the discourse relating to parents involved with child protection interventions is; they have deliberately or knowingly caused harm to their child and deserve to be punished. However, when we hear their stories of complexity and challenges which have impeded their ability to care safely for their child, or they have barriers that impact upon their ability to care safely (and are assessed as being a risk i.e. mental health, disability), we begin to hear a different discourse. Added to the complexity of parents' lives is the emotional trauma associated with the removal of children and the story of disempowerment that underpins the lived experience of statutory interventions.

A project officer was employed for a three month period to work alongside parents. Initially workshops were set up to provide a group work environment; however, it became evident that parents were less comfortable in this setting and one to one sessions were arranged. Twenty four parents including one father and two grandmothers participated – nine were from the community and fifteen were incarcerated women from Bandyup (maximum security) and Boronia Pre-Release programme.

The project officer met with participants, listening to their stories and assisting them to think about what images came to mind when

thinking about particular points of their story, or what images reflect particular feelings. The parents were then asked to take photos of the various images – a few wanted the project officer to take the photos with them. The images were taken and printed, and then a narrative was written by the parent to accompany the photos. Most parents were able to work independently to find the words they wanted whilst some asked for more guidance in the writing process.

The work with women in prison was conducted in three group sessions with the project officer, the manager from the agency and the Strong Links Officer from the prison. The mothers recounted their stories individually or in small groups; workers listened and reflected back the images they were identifying or striking words that were repeated or stated with intensity. As the mothers could not take their own photographs, the project officer undertook this task as directed by the mothers. The following sessions conducted allowed the mothers to write their story to accompany their photos.

The compilation of work completed is an array of imagery and narrative that is challenging to see and read. There are some images of hope, many of resilience, most of despair and heartache. The stories do not shy away from the reality of the journey.

Parents involved in child protection services continue to feel invisible and unheard; they have an intense desire to have their stories heard and acknowledged. They are proud of the work they produced and want it to be used to help others understand their experiences and to hear their messages of what helps them survive and then become more strong and hopeful.

It is envisaged the work will be published and a community exhibition held.

See some of the wonderful work below:



The walls of the Fin WA office are adorned with parents' story work. Visitors come to view the work at the AGM, Oct 2013.

Some of Emma's work:

The Ferris Wheel



The ferris wheel goes slow,
 Around and around and around.
 This is how it felt going to court.
 The constant, slow process.
 In and out, in and out, of court.

Tangled



The tangle represents the system. Once you get in, you can't get out of the tangle.

Ocean of Tears



They took my baby from birth.
 I cried an ocean.
 Unless you've experiences of having your child
 taken from you, you can't imagine or explain
 how heart wrenching it is for a parent.
 You never stop loving them,
 You never stop missing them,
 You never stop thinking of them.
 The tears and heartache never stop.

Debbie Henderson
 Manager Fin WA