



In the Loop Winter 2020

Editorial

2020 has brought us all unprecedented challenges. For the SPSW Covid-19 has forced the cancellation or postponement of several professional development activities, the product of a lot of hard work and organisation by both the CPE Committee and of course, the presenters. However, we are now back on track and have presented our first workshop for the year, Working with Couples. However, in the wider scheme of things this is merely an inconvenience. As governments around the world scramble to decide how best to manage the pandemic with deaths totalling thousands in many countries, we once again can count ourselves fortunate to live in the most isolated state in the most isolated and sparsely populated country in the world that also has a stable system of government and a well-functioning and accessible health system.

While we have had to undergo a few adaptations to our lifestyles and have been saddened by those who we have lost to the virus, we have really not fared too badly in relative terms. In fact, there have been some positives that seem to have been gained in the past few months. Finally, a spotlight has been thrown on the need to do something about the plight of our homeless population. While sadly I note that we still have far too many street present people, the numbers have started to decline. Many indigenous people marooned in Perth and regional towns have been returned to country. Some locals were temporarily accommodated in hotels or at the Woodman Point quarantine facility, originally build for the Spanish flue pandemic and since used as a recreational camp. For some these temporary measures have been the beginning of a process of moving into stable housing. As a society, we have a responsibility not to return those people provided care by the state to the street. As social workers we have a responsibility to be at the forefront of the battle to ensure that this does not happen.

Other good things have happened too, a new sense of community has been spawned in many places, people are reporting that they have met their neighbours for the first time and that there is a new sense of neighbourhood. Families are spending more time together and people -and dogs- are spending more time out of doors utilising our beautiful parklands and enjoying our

unusually warm autumn weather. Parents have developed a new respect for teachers, having had a go at the job themselves and most of us have increased our IT skills! However, some isolating at home have not found it a haven but an even more dangerous place to be. Our new found sense of neighbourhood needs to extend to being vigilant about the safety of our neighbours and our customers at possible risk of domestic violence and to ensuring that they receive the support and security that they need.

Board Member Profile

Judith Wilkinson is one of the new SPSW Board Members elected at last year's AGM. Judith recalls that Social Work was a profession that she "fell into" having left school with the intention of doing medicine. However, while away on an exchange programme she realised that she was planning to do this because she could rather than it being what she wanted to do. Instead she enrolled in Arts which she enjoyed but on completing this degree was uncertain as to what should come next. Fortunately, Judith learned about the post graduate social work course at La Trobe University and thought that sounded interesting. She was happy to move to Melbourne having been out of home at college for the last three years and was wanting a change. First though, she needed to have a face to face interview to qualify for entry to the course but could not afford on her student funds to fly to Melbourne. But clearly Judith doing Social Work was meant to be as it just so happened the course controller was visiting Perth for a conference and was able to interview her while here. While she did not know a great deal about social work her strong sense of social justice ensured her a place.

Upon graduation Judith had planned to take a year off to go travelling but was way laid by an offer of a nine-month locum with the Department of Mental Retardation as it was then called, which she really enjoyed. Her travel plans were further delayed by another locum at the quaintly named Gordon Home for Boys and Girls. Judith recalls the statue at the front of the building which sported a plaque declaring that General Gordon was a "lover of boys" – a statement which today might cause some concern.

In 1982, Judith embarked on her travels and arrived in the UK where she based herself in Oxford and travelled extensively. When funds ran out, she

took a temporary social work job at which she planned to stay for three months but spent two years, working at the John Radcliffe Hospital. The following two years were spent travelling all over Europe with periodic returns to London to top up the funds with residential work in children's homes in the Borough of Southwark.

On return to Perth in 1986 Judith worked for several months with infants and the newly established child sex abuse team at PMH before going travelling again to India and Nepal. Judith then returned to Oxford where she took a job in old age psychiatry for six months. She had not expected to enjoy this work but soon fell in love with it, working both on the wards and in the community. Just when she thought all those years with a pack on her back had stalled her career progression, the county social service restructured and Judith was appointed to the position of Manager of Adult Services in the south of the county.

While on a trekking holiday in north east Iceland Judith met the love of her life who was from Dublin. For a while she commuted between Oxford and Dublin before moving to Dublin where she was employed as the Project Manager for an Older People's advocacy organisation which provided a programme of arts, education and physical activities for older people. While in Dublin Judith enrolled in a Masters of Business Studies at the University College Dublin. By the time she had completed her thesis, Judith was six months pregnant and was happy to do a bit of part time work before moving with her family back to Perth.

While her child was young Judith did various bits of consultancy and provided training in what is now the Department of Communities. She then obtained a temporary job working with relative carers. Having never worked with Aboriginal people before, Judith found this a wonderful opportunity to expand her cultural knowledge and for the first time in her life, have close contact with Aboriginal people. The job which involved working in teams of two consisting of one Aboriginal person and one non-Aboriginal person travelling around the state. Those long drives were filled with yarning and sharing and learning. Her next full-time position saw her return to management as the Director of Strategic Services in the Office of the Director General where she managed the leadership team and addressed ministerials. In 2008 Judith took the position of Director of Fostering Services. In 2012, Judith joined Key Assets as State Director and remained in this position until last year when she moved into the position of National Director, Strategic Projects.

Judith believes that Social Work has a strong and bright future given what it offers. Social Work builds skills that are valuable across a range of services and which she believes form a strong foundation for management "The ability to listen, to accommodate difference, to have a broad world

view contributes to being a successful manager who can encompass a broad spectrum of challenges and allow staff to do their best within their own capabilities" says Judith. She is excited about what social work courses are doing now with a focus on social justice and non-discriminatory practice rather than on individual intervention and is very impressed with the current crop of social work students.

Judith became involved in the SPSW through her relationship with Barbara Meddin who she came to know when she was working in the Department and also while Barbara was leading professional development for workers at Key Assets. Judith is impressed by the values driven organisation that is the SPSW.

In terms of her own future, Judith was looking towards retirement. However, while working at home in the current situation of isolation, Judith caught a glimpse of what retirement might be like and realised that she is not yet ready for it. "Work energises me" says Judith, "working with brilliant people in an organisation that makes some positive difference to families' lives in both formal and informal ways". Instead, Judith has cut back to four days a week and while she was doing a lot of travelling across Australia and to the East Kimberley, she is not able to do so much travelling now due to travel restrictions and would quite like to keep it that way. Her intention is to remain with Key Assets.

In the future Judith would like to see the SPSW continue to focus on the professional development that it does well. Also facilitating forums such as the one that was planned but abandoned due to Covid 19 that give the opportunity to hear from others about their careers as she feels that doing more of that sharing would serve the profession well.

Bursary Offered for Aboriginal Social Work Student

The SPSW would like to offer the following bursary to an Aboriginal Social Work Student to assist them in their studies:

- Complimentary Student Membership of the SPSW for twelve months.
- \$500 per year of study towards text books.
- Two free SPSW training events.

To apply for the bursary please send your application, including your CV, proof of course enrolment and two referees to eo@spsw.net.au

Remembering John Hodges

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the passing of John Hodges earlier this year. John was an excellent social worker to who I had the privilege of working alongside. John spent 17 good years with the Office of the Public Advocate. His working life also incorporated periods with both the Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons and Community Mental Health Services which gave him a solid foundation for his excellent work as a Guardian. He provided strong advocacy for the people that he represented both at the State Administrative Tribunal and with other departments and services ensuring the best outcomes for his clients.

The Members from the State Administrative Tribunal who knew John for many years have all expressed their high regard for him and are also saddened by his passing. John's academic life was marked by university degrees including a Masters of Social Work.

John was someone committed to serving humanity intelligently, and with strong ethics, compassion and a deep and enduring sense of justice especially for the more vulnerable in our community. Our thoughts are with his wife Gen and family.

Chris Coopes Award

The School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology Prize Giving Ceremony on Tuesday 4 February 2020 saw the Chris Coopes Award for the Highest Mark in Social Work Philosophy, Policy and Context awarded to April Hall. The SPSW is delighted to be able to continue to provide an award to a Social Work student who will undoubtedly become an outstanding member of the profession.

Curtin School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology has sent the following letter thanking the SPSW:

The School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology would like to thank Society of Professional Social Workers and your nominated representative, Brian Dodds, for participating in our 2020 School Prize Giving Ceremony.

The Prize Giving Ceremony is the School's most important annual event; where students, staff, family, friends, sponsors, special guests and the community come together to recognise, reward and celebrate the outstanding achievements of the School's best performing students.

It is due in part to the generosity of our sponsors that the Prize Giving Ceremony is made possible. To that end, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for your

involvement in the event and look forward to your participation next year.

Yours sincerely



Professor Angus Buchanan

Head of School

School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology



April Hall (centre) receiving the Chris Coopes award from SPSW Vice President, Brian Dodds (left) and Chris Coopes (Right)

Save Social Work Campaign

Social Workers provide essential services to those most in need, playing a crucial role in supporting those most vulnerable in our community during difficult times. It is expected by 2024, there will be a 29% growth in the need for Social Workers. However, the Australian Government released a discussion paper which states that Commonwealth subsidies for social work will drop from \$10,821 to \$1,100 and student contribution will rise from \$6,684 to \$14,500 per year. These changes will exacerbate already critical shortages of qualified Social Workers. Less Social Workers means less support for Australians doing it tough and in a post-COVID world we need more Social Workers. Save Social Work is urging the Federal Government not to increase fees for social work degrees because the impact could be disastrous.

[Access resources](#) and [sign the petition to Save Social Work](#)

Poets' Corner

Black Lives Matter

Why did it take the US to go up in flames
For us to recall our own black people's names
Who've died in state custody for so many years
Whose families have shed so many tears?

John Pat's death sparked an outcry, we wrote a
report

Thirty-seven years later it has still come to
nought

The recommendations still sit on the shelf
Our government ought to be ashamed of its self.

Who cared at all when Ms Dhu cried out in pain?
Another black life sadly thrown down the drain
And so many more who have long been
forgotten

In a state where something is terribly rotten.

Folk who should never have in custody been
The numbers locked up are just quite obscene
For being too poor to pay a fine
For confessions unread but forced to sign.

While the fine defaulter's law is now to change
There's so much more we need to rearrange
We need to keep our government right on its
toes

To continue to address our first people's woes.

Anonymous

Please send contributions to Poet's Corner to:
eo@spsw.net.au

Don't forget that the **SPSW Locum and Employment Register** keeps you up to date with employment opportunities for social workers and is a great way to find the best staff. Contact Barbara Meddin at waybob@iinet.net.au to join or advertise positions.

Don't forget, your membership gives you
great benefits to save you money



<https://www.shoprite.com.au/>

CPE Workshops for July – December 2020

- July 27th - Working with Couples – Mark Joffe (*very well received*)
- Aug 28th – Ambiguous Loss – Kanthi Perera
- September 18th– Understanding and Managing Dependence- Bill Saunders
- October 9th – Dealing with Difficult Staff and Clients – Barbara Meddin
- October 22nd - Webinar – Family Violence – 2.5 hours - Tori Cooke
- November 19th -Stretching Your Practice- Gail Green & Adam Peaty
- December- Date to Be Confirmed – Aiming for Workshop on Dementia but not finalized with presenter yet.

Feature Article

A traumatic past can make you a better social worker, but it might block you studying it in the first place.

Article republished from:

<https://theconversation.com/a-traumatic-past-can-make-you-a-better-social-worker-but-it-might-block-you-studying-it-in-the-first-place-115291>

by [Peter Young](#)

Lecturer in Social Work, Griffith University

Last year, I received a phone call from a prospective student. She wanted to know if our university would accept her into a Master of Social Work program. Another local university had just knocked her back.

The caller had a drug-related criminal history and was ineligible for a working with children clearance (a [blue card](#) in Queensland).

She explained she had a previous conviction of drug importation – an offence she committed to help support her heroin addiction. Now, free of drugs, she wanted to do something positive using what she had learnt from this difficult period of her life.

Such stories are common – many social work students have traumatic histories that have led them to pursue that particular career choice.

But a working with children clearance is a precondition of enrolment in two-thirds of Australian universities (even if the student doesn't intend to work in a child-related field). The remaining universities flag this as a likely requirement prior to undertaking placement – a practical placement is integral to a social work degree.

As serious drug-related offences generally prohibit people from getting a working with children clearance, the caller would be ineligible to study in most Australian universities. And yet lived experience can make for better social workers.

Working with children clearance is almost universal

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the terrible consequence for people betrayed by trusted carers. The lesson from this, and other similar inquiries, is we must do all we can to keep children safe.

To reduce the risk of harm to children, Australian states and territories now screen staff and volunteers before allowing them to work with children. Screening arrangements take varying forms, but all broadly adopt the same approach.

Past contact with the criminal justice system (including juvenile offences) are evaluated to determine whether a person might pose a risk to the well-being of children who may be in their care. Some past offences, such as violent or sexual crimes against children, trigger automatic ineligibility.

Other offences, such as drug-related convictions, are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Social work degrees require students to do 1,000 hours of (usually unpaid) supervised practice. Universities depend on the goodwill of human service organisations for these field placement opportunities.

But risk has become a central consideration in the design and delivery of welfare services in Australia. It is now common for adult-specific welfare services to require all staff and volunteers, including social work students, to have a child-related suitability clearance.

To not use the most stringent risk-screening tools available, even if not needed by law, could be thought of as negligent. So working with children clearances have become an almost universal requirement in the human services sector. But

this focus on mitigating risk has a significant impact on social work programs.

Social workers and trauma

Social work students have a much higher incidence of various forms of childhood trauma than students of other disciplines. A 1993 US study found 22% of social work students reported childhood sexual abuse compared to 2% of business students.

Many people who gain criminal convictions have also experienced childhood or adult trauma and associated self-medication using illicit drugs. One study of Aboriginal women in prison in New South Wales found 70% had been victims of childhood sexual abuse. Of these, 98% reported they were drug users (mostly heroin) and that their engagement with the criminal justice system was closely tied to drug use.

As this trend of excluding people with a range of criminal convictions from studying social work continues, Australia will inevitably have fewer social work graduates with lived experience of trauma and addiction.

This is a problem because studies have found lived experiences to be helpful in a range of social work fields. These include addiction-treatment programs, mental health, domestic and family violence, and working with sex workers.

And given the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system, Australia will have fewer First Nations People eligible to study social work.

The people disadvantaged by this emerging trend are not just prospective students. They are also future clients, who will have reduced access to practitioners who can draw on the lessons from their own journey of recovery from past trauma.

Legislative reform to prohibit organisations from requiring child-related criminal history clearances for roles that don't provide services to children would be a helpful start to tackling this unintended adverse outcome.

Universities can also play a role by more actively valuing the lived experience of students with trauma histories. We can seek out creative solutions to the difficulties of finding placements for these students with criminal histories.

As for the student who called, she would be accepted into our social work program and her future clients would benefit.

This article previously referred to a study of women in prison in New South Wales that showed high rates of childhood sexual abuse. The word "Aboriginal" has now been added to more accurately reflect this study.