



In the Loop Winter 2017

Welcome to the first newsletter for our new website. It has been a long time in gestation but it is here at last. Over the last few months we have been working on putting together the usual first class professional development opportunities for you (see Dr Meddin's Professional Development report below) as well as working on a submission to the National Report on Elder Protection and developing a Reconciliation Action Plan which is in its infancy. Of course, what we need to progress this is input from some Aboriginal social workers, so if you can help, or know someone who can please contact us at eo@spsw.net.au.

Currently we are all working in an environment of significant change. Whether your department is part of the Machinery of Government restructure, you are working in a non-government agency which is dealing with a changing government focus or you are trying to keep up with the impact of the introduction of the NDIS, we are all having to find new ways to adapt to radical change in our work places. Change is a permanent feature in human services, how else would we move forward developmentally? However, the evolutionary pace of change to which we have been accustomed appears to have suddenly become cataclysmic. Many of us are in positions which are threatened by current events or are seeing our roles radically changed. While this is very unsettling is it necessarily a bad thing?

Having just returned from a sojourn in the Andes it occurs to me that magnificent mountain chains cannot be created without experiencing land-slides and perhaps there are some lessons we can learn from the builders of the Inca Empire. Firstly, build your foundations well. Don't try to move all the rocks out of your way, incorporate the strong ones into your structure in situ. Thus, in times of change let us not throw out those things that are working and that can provide foundations for the future. Secondly, Inca doorways have a wider base and a narrower top. This provides strength. Many of us are working in top heavy departments, which mean there are too few people at the base to do the actual work. Taking this opportunity to strengthen our base and decrease the bureaucracy at the top will help us to achieve outcomes much more efficiently. Thirdly, the Inca knew that in earthquake prone areas ensuring that their stonework interlocked on as many facets as possible made it strong. Likewise, we need to be interfacing across as many agencies and departments as possible so that the people we are trying to assist

don't fall through the cracks in the stonework. Finally, making your structure as flexible as possible protects against shock. Recently we have all felt our roles tightening and becoming more proscriptive. In the new world, we need to find ways to loosen that inflexibility to allow us to use our creativity to facilitate change both in the individuals with whom we may work and in the environments in which we make our endeavours. (Editor)

Travelling Ethically

Many of us love to travel but as social workers we often want to ensure that we are giving back to the communities that we visit and are not contributing to their exploitation. While the SPSW is not in the habit of providing advertising, you might be interested to know about a travel company that I personally find fits comfortably with my social work values. (There may of course be others that I have not yet come across and which you might like to tell us about in future issues). **G Adventures'** core values state that they love to change people's lives; create happiness and community; do the right thing; embrace the bizarre; and lead with service. Their mission is to help people and communities thrive through solutions, not handouts. They do this by providing the resources and opportunities for local people in the areas they serve to develop and strengthen their communities, and their network of travelers provide these communities with the long-term income to make these solutions sustainable.

Their Planeterra Foundation, which you contribute to just by booking a tour with G Adventures, supports local enterprises that provide sustainable employment for local people. You can find out more about all of this at <https://www.gadventures.com/about-us/sustainable-tourism/>. They also provide a great range of tours to suit all tastes. If you love learning about the history, culture and environment of the place you are visiting you might like to try one of their National Geographic range of tours that ensures you have access to excellent specialist guides as well as your fantastic Chief Experience Officer (CEO) who ensures you find those special places you may never otherwise encounter. (Amanda Perlinski, Traveller)

Board Member Profile

This issue I would like to introduce you to one of our newer Board Members, Natalie Wickens-McFarlane. Natalie works as Disability Practice Leader at Key Assets. Natalie started working in the disability sector as a social trainer in the days when many people with disabilities lived in the hostels which started to be devolved in the early nineties. Natalie was firstly involved in the devolution of Brighton Hostel. This saw children returning to their families when the education department started offering more inclusive education for country children, who had often previously come to Perth to access special schooling. For those children who were unable to return to families, alternative family placements were arranged.

Following this Natalie worked for a short time in a group home for adults with challenging behaviour before moving to Bunbury to be involved in a pilot program which re-connected people living in institutions back to their local communities. Natalie and her partner took on providing live in care for a young person who wanted to live closer to his family in the South West. This four-year commitment gave Natalie an understanding of what it is like to be a fulltime carer. On returning to Perth Natalie worked as a supervisor for Activ Foundation's children's Respite Homes before taking on the role of Family Services Coordinator. It was in this role, she was exposed to the complexities faced by families of children with disabilities and the difficulty in negotiating the various government departments that were committed to working in silos. At the time, her partner was working with youth at risk and driven by a strong sense of social justice the two enrolled in Social Work at Curtin with a view to expand their learning and professionalise their practice.

However, by the time that Natalie was finishing her Social Work degree she was found herself taking on the new role of parenthood. She therefore decided to delay her re-entry to the workforce for a couple of years. At the time, Natalie and her partner lived in the Kimberley Region where he worked for Juvenile Justice and Natalie did a little contract work with small Aboriginal Corporations. A shortage of foster carers in the region also saw Natalie conscripted into providing emergency foster care for a newborn awaiting a family placement. This gave her some insight into the foster care system. A short return to Perth allowed her to complete her degree before the family moved again, this time to Kalgoorlie where she worked part-time for DCP as a Placement Services Officer.

Missing the Kimberley, the family transferred to Broome where Natalie was fortunate enough to experience working with remote communities and foster families in the West Kimberley Region. Returning to Perth in 2013 Natalie worked for Life Without Barriers for eighteen months before accepting her current position with Key Assets, a role she describes as her 'Dream job'. Key Assets was set up by a Foster Carer and a Social Worker with its core business being the provision of Foster Placements and support. Natalie leads the Disability Program where support services are directed to young people with a disability exiting the Out of Home Care system (leaving care) or living with complex support needs in the community. Individuals are supported to move towards independence and encouraged to exercise their voice in determining how the services they receive are delivered. Practice is person-centred. The disability

team incorporates a critical social work framework when working within the NDIS and Child Protection frameworks with the aim of identifying systemic barriers to independence and actualisation of individual's goals. Overlaying this practice, the team works through a trauma informed lens. Key Assets is an international organisation whose values, skills and knowledge-base are borne from Social Work practice.

Natalie sees some significant changes afoot for the profession, particularly in her area of children in care with disabilities. Both Child Protection and the Disability Service Sector are under reform in Western Australia (Out of Home Care Reform and NDIS). This has resulted in great uncertainty within the Human Services Sector; many Social Workers are feeling 'change-fatigued'. Natalie believes we are still close to the beginning of the long road of welfare reform and although not having a clear and comprehensive rule book to guide us can be daunting, it can also mean there is room to affect change and this makes for an exciting time for Social Work practice. Natalie reports that over the last ten years the number of children in care has more than doubled and 52% of children in care identified as Aboriginal (100% in the Kimberley). Natalie believes that social workers have a responsibility to critically reflect on the role they continue to play in the current removal of Aboriginal children from land, lore and culture by learning from past practices and applying current epistemology to encourage better outcomes for future generations.

Natalie says that she was first attracted to the SPSW by the Conference delivered in the early 2000's. She later joined the SPSW as it was cheaper than the AASW. She would love to see SPSW facilitate another Social Work Conference that encourages shared learning opportunities. Natalie would like to see the SPSW take an active role around addressing issues facing the Aboriginal community like bridging the gap initiatives and foster learning opportunities for those working in an Aboriginal context. She would also like to see a continuation of the provision of more affordable and accessible options for learning and development and hopes the Society will always have a role in keeping up the standard of practice. Natalie reports that joining the SPSW has allowed her to feel a part of a community of practice that has extended her learning beyond the areas she is exposed to through her work role.

Natalie is inspired to keep going by working in an environment where she is always learning from everyone around her. She says the current reform, for all its challenges, has also provided a creative space where one is restricted only by your own imagination. She feels privileged to be a part of a great team at Key Assets where there is a beautiful energy which facilitates positive and lasting changes for children, young people and their families. In a time when we are bombarded through media by negative images, discrimination and terror Natalie sees social work as providing a great foundation for fostering positive change. Social Workers are trained to unpack their everyday experiences in order to make sense and understanding of the world. Sharing this learning by reflecting and unpacking the information we receive we can advocate to others in the wider community to also make a positive and lasting difference to the lives they come into contact with. Natalie is considering starting a Degree in Business Studies which she feels may provide her with the language and context of finance and economics, making her more effective in leading change in the new Human services market.

Remember your membership entitles you to great savings:



CPE Update

Don't miss the next exciting CPE workshops and this year's final forum. The workshops include Getting the Most Out of Your Supervision, Vicarious Trauma – What is it and What can you do about It? When Families Divide – Applying Skills to Support Children and Families in the Family Court, and Working with Personality Disordered Clients, What Makes Them Tick. The final forum for this year is Medical Care and Homelessness – A Unique Service for Medical Respite and Allied Services. Attached are the fliers for the Supervision workshop and the Medical Care forum.

If you would like to be part of the planning for SPSW's 2018 CPE calendar please get in touch with Dr Barbara Meddin, waybob@iinet.net.au

ELDER ABUSE - A NATIONAL LEGAL RESPONSE ...FINAL REPORT

The 4th National Elder Abuse Conference was held in Melbourne, 23rd to 25th February 2016. The Conference was opened by Senator George Brandis, Attorney General for Australia.

Senator Brandis stated that the Government was appalled by the level of elder abuse in the community and he would ask the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to conduct an Inquiry in relation to safeguarding older Australians from abuse.

In May 2017 this Report was published. It has 428 pages and there is also a 28-page Summary Report.

The initial three sections are The Terms of Reference, Participants and Recommendations.

There are 14 chapters:

1. Executive Summary
2. Concepts and Context
3. A National Plan to Combat Elder Abuse
4. Aged Care
5. Enduring Appointments
6. Family Agreements
7. Superannuation
8. Wills
9. Banking
10. Guardianship & Financial Administration
11. Health and National Disability Insurance Scheme
12. Social Security
13. Criminal Justice Responses
14. Safeguarding Adults at Risk

The Report states the overall effect on page 28 'Outcomes'.

"1.64 The overall effect of the ALRC's recommendations in this Report, Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response, will be to safeguard older people from abuse and support their choices and wishes through:

Improved responses to elder abuse in aged care;

- Enhanced employment screening of aged care workers;
- Greater scrutiny regarding the use of restrictive practices in residential aged care;
- Building trust and confidence in enduring documents as important advance planning tools;
- Protecting older people when 'assets for care' go wrong;
- Banks and financial institutions protecting vulnerable customers from abuse;
- Better succession planning across the Self-managed superannuation funds (SMSF) sector; and
- Adult safeguarding regimes protecting and supporting at risk adults.

"1.65 These outcomes should be further pursued through a National Plan to combat elder abuse and new empirical research into the prevalence of elder abuse.

"1.66 This Inquiry has acknowledged that elder abuse is indeed 'everybody's business'. It is also everybody's responsibility – a responsibility not only to recognise elder abuse, but most importantly, to respond to it effectively.

The recommendations in this Report address what legal reform can do to prevent abuse from occurring and to provide clear responses and redress when abuse occurs.

"1.67 Ageing eventually comes to all Australians and ensuring that all older people live dignified and autonomous lives free from the pain and degradation of elder abuse must be a priority."

A crucial chapter in this Report is chapter 3 'A National Plan to Combat Elder Abuse'.

"Recommendation 3-1 The Australian government, in cooperation with state and territory governments, should develop a National Plan to combat elder abuse. The Plan should:

- a) establish a national policy framework;
- b) outline strategies and actions by government and the community;
- c) set priorities for the implementation of agreed actions; and
- d) provide for further research & evaluation.

Recommendation 3-2

The National Plan to combat elder abuse should be led by a steering committee under the imprimatur of the Law, Crime and Community Safety Council of the Council of Australian Governments.

Recommendation 3-3

The National Plan to combat elder abuse should identify goals, including:

- a) promoting the autonomy and agency of older people;
- b) addressing ageism and promoting community understanding of elder abuse;
- c) achieving national consistency;
- d) safeguarding at-risk adults and improving responses; and
- e) building the evidence base.

Recommendation 3-4

The National Plan should take into account the different experiences and needs of older persons with respect to:

- a) gender;
- b) sexual orientation;
- c) disability; and
- d) cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Plan should also take into account the experiences and needs of:

- a) older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- b) older people living in rural and remote communities.

3.36 The ALRC identified two framing principles for this Inquiry: dignity and autonomy; and protection and safeguarding. These are discussed in Chapter 2. These framing principles underpin all the law reform recommendations in this Report. They start from a position of respecting and supporting individuals in their choices and in the exercise of their rights, but also providing safeguards against elder abuse. The ALRC considers that the National Plan to combat elder abuse should be guided by similar principles and inform its goals.

At this time, we don't know what steps have been taken to implement the recommendations in the Report, and we have a particular interest in the proposed National Plan. The SPSW will be writing to Senator Brandis to clarify the issue.

The National Legal Response is a very important document and out of this will come discussions with all states and territories, but this will all take time. What is needed is a WA state plan for elder abuse.

Chris Coopes who along with Roslyn Budd comprise the Elder Protection Sub Committee of the SPSW.

Vale Suzanne Harris

Sue sadly left the world on the 18th of August after battling with serious health issues for many years. She will be much missed by her husband Nigel and adult children James and Katie as well as many relatives, friends and colleagues. Sue was a fantastic mentor for social workers particularly in the disability field. Her role in supporting families and in the deinstitutionalisation of children cannot be underestimated. After working for many years as a Senior Social Worker at Disability Services Sue took on the Executive Officer position at the Developmental Disability Council where she worked tirelessly to improve the circumstances of people with developmental disabilities and their families. Her energy, creativity and empathy always pervaded her work and brought the reality of the lives of people with disabilities into the light via various campaigns, including the adoption of politicians by people with disabilities which helped set the agenda for a national scheme to support people with disabilities. May she now rest in peace.

SPSW AGM

When: Tuesday 24th October 6:00pm

Where: Hotel Northbridge – 210 Lake Street, Northbridge.

Please come along and ensure that we have a quorum for this important event. Also consider nominating for the Board.

The AGM will be followed by dinner at members' expense but please RSVP to eo@spsw.net.au so that we can book a suitable table. A great chance to catch up with friends and colleagues.