

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK!



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AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers



THE AASW FELLOW

We are pleased to announce that highly experienced members of the AASW can now apply to become a Fellow of the Australian Association of Social Workers (FAASW).

Becoming a Fellow means you're recognised as an expert in your field, with Fellows recognised and respected worldwide as leaders of industry.

We are pleased to introduce the seven inaugural AASW Fellows:

Lillian Flanagan
Joseph Fleming
Sharon McCallum
Marie Novella-McMahon
Thomas O'Brien
Jon Wannberg
Jill Wilson

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DIFFICULT
ROADS
LEAD TO
BEAUTIFUL
DESTINATIONS

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Social Work Focus

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NEXT EDITION

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AASW Members whose articles are published in *Social Work Focus* can claim time spent to research and prepare them towards CPD requirements, specifically Category 3.

MANAGING EDITOR: Dr Matt Loads

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the past and present Traditional Owners and ongoing Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, their ancestors and their families.

Join us on social media:



From the new AASW National President

Linda Ford

I am thrilled to step into the role of President, and I wanted to share a bit about myself as an introduction.



As we look towards the future, I shall focus on fostering equity within our profession.

I have served on the AASW Board since 2017, and it has been a privilege. Throughout this time, I've been committed to fostering strong leadership and advocating for the values that underscore our profession: a commitment to social work and its profound impact on society.

The honour of being the first Aboriginal President of AASW fills me with immense pride. This milestone represents a personal achievement and a significant step forward for our collective vision.

I have wanted to be a social worker since I was 13 years old and I still love being a social worker. It is not just what I do but provides a guide as to how I live my life in that I hold empathy and compassion for others in my hands and in my heart. As an Aboriginal person, family is the most important part of my life, but social work is the next significant passion for me.

My professional journey spans over 28 years, encompassing diverse sectors within both rural and urban landscapes. From child protection to mental health, health, and tertiary education, each experience has shaped my understanding and commitment to effecting positive change. Recognition on national and international platforms, including my role as the Australian representative for the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) Indigenous Commission, has been humbling and inspiring.



LINDA FORD

AASW National President

Holding roles such as past President of the North Queensland Branch and Chair of the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group has given me invaluable insights into the heartbeat of our organisation.

I am so happy to have three First Nations women on the National Board and believe that this will promote and empower greater understanding and empathy for our First Nations social workers, communities and consumers.

As we look towards the future, I shall focus on fostering equity within our profession. Social work is a tapestry woven with the diverse threads of age, cultural heritage, socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, religion, disability and more. Embracing this diversity is pivotal as we propel our profession forward. National registration, a significant goal on our horizon, must benefit each member equitably. I am committed to ensuring equity remains a cornerstone of our organisational initiatives.

My door is always open. I encourage you to reach out and share your thoughts, concerns, and aspirations. Let's engage in conversations that drive us towards progress, growth, and a better future.

Warm regards,

Linda Ford

Welcome to the summer issue of *Social Work Focus*

As we reach the end of another year, it's with pride and reflection that I welcome you to the summer edition of *Social Work Focus*. It's been a year of achievements, and growth for our Association, marking a journey filled with dedication and commitment from each of you.

Firstly, I extend congratulations to Linda Ford on assuming the role of our new president.

One of the highlights of this year was the successful continuation of social work registration in South Australia, evidence of our ongoing efforts in recognition and regulation within our field. Being nominated as one of the Associations of the Year award by the Associations Forum in November was a moment of pride for all of us.

In 2023, our advocacy bore fruit as we championed pivotal changes, embedding social work as a service option within HCF Health Insurance and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. These wins underscore the key role of social work in healthcare, marking milestones in our journey towards recognition and integration.

Our dedication to excellence was further shown through initiatives such as launching our revised Accreditation Framework and establishing an independent Accreditation Council. This work ensures that our standards align with the highest benchmarks, benefiting both our graduates and the communities they serve.

Launching the AASW PhD Celebrating Excellence series and introducing New practice standards demonstrate our commitment to knowledge, academic rigour, and professional integrity.

Within this issue, you'll find a wealth of helpful writing, mainly focusing on

young people and their interactions with social work. From articles by Sin-Ying Tan on growth through travel to perspectives on working with young individuals from AJ Williams-Tchen and Judith Garsed, a range of thought-provoking content is here. As the year draws to a close, I encourage you to dive into this issue and absorb these articles and diverse perspectives.

Lastly, I wish each of you a happy and safe summer ahead. Take this time to rest and recharge, gearing up for the next chapter in 2024.

Warm regards,



Cindy Smith



CINDY SMITH

Chief Executive Officer



One of the highlights of this year was the successful continuation of social work registration in South Australia



Highlights from the latest issue of *Australian Social Work*

In the latest Issue of *Australian Social Work* (October 2023) authors highlight the importance of social justice; integrity; culturally responsive, ethical practice; and life-long learning.

The authors showcase innovation in social work education—the basis on which professional practice wisdom builds—and we illuminate the unique reach, challenges, and diversity of social work practice. However, a different, looming challenge to professional integrity and ethical practice is tackled in the Editorial, where some of the concerns and implications of generative Artificial Intelligence (generative AI) for social work are pondered.

As we know, in November 2022, OpenAI released ChatGPT, a generative artificial intelligence (generative AI) Large Language

Model (LLM) that readily can generate realistic, natural text outputs from simple prompts. Over time, the implications for social work may be considerable. As argued in the Editorial, Generative AI is here to stay, and in coming months and years, we will all need to engage in serious discussions about the use of generative AI tools in social work education, practice, research, and scholarly publishing.

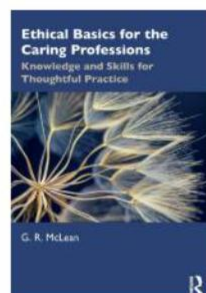
In addition to the stimulating articles, several book reviews feature in the October 2023 Issue. Here are two to consider:



About the author

Susan Gair is Editor of *Australian Social Work*, and Adjunct Associate Professor at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland.

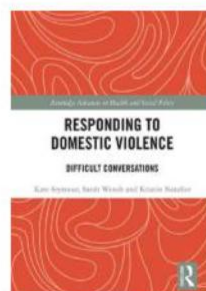
ETHICAL BASICS FOR THE CARING PROFESSIONS



Ethical Basics for the Caring Professions: Knowledge and skills for thoughtful practice, by G R McLean, Oxford, Routledge, 2022, 226 pp. (paperback), ISBN 9781032009568.

In this book the author considers the foundations of ethical thinking underpinning professional practice, providing meaningful examples to help inform social work responses to complex moral problems and ethical dilemmas.

RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Responding to Domestic Violence: Difficult conversations, by Kate Seymour, Sarah Wendt, and Kris Natalier, London, Routledge, 2023, 138 pp., ISBN 9780367774288.

This book uses a feminist, post-structural theoretical lens to critically analyse power, gender, men's use of violence, and women's experiences of living with violence to provide new perspectives and a way forward.

Celebrating distinction

New AASW Fellows



The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) proudly congratulates the individuals who have been named Fellows. The accolade of becoming an AASW Fellow signifies expertise within the field and recognition as a leader in the industry. This recognition solidifies a robust and enduring bond with the AASW, underscoring the commitment to advancing the profession.

Join us in applauding the following individuals:

- Lillian Flanagan
- Joseph Silvio Fleming
- Sharon McCallum
- Marie Therese Novella-McMahon
- Thomas J O'Brien
- Jon Wannberg
- Jill Wilson

The newly inducted AASW Fellows are entitled to a suite of exclusive benefits:

- AASW Fellow digital badge
- Certificate of Fellow Member status
- Use of the relevant postnominal FAASW
- Acknowledgement as a Fellow in the AASW's Find a Social Worker tool
- Invitation to engage in activities to share knowledge, expertise, and experience.

Discover if you meet the criteria for eligibility by visiting the AASW website. Embrace the opportunity to join this distinguished cohort of professionals and contribute to the advancement of social work.

For more information and to explore your eligibility, visit the AASW website today!

HORIZON CAREER CENTRE

DEDICATED JOBS WEBSITE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

horizon@asw.asn.au
horizonemployment.com.au



Social workers and funding schemes

A new AASW resource has been developed as a quick reference guide for members wanting to provide services under specific funding schemes.

Australia has many opportunities to fund support and services required by people in need. From Medicare and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to the various workers' compensation schemes across the states, these schemes provide valuable funds for those who meet the relevant criteria. These schemes can also be challenging to navigate. Finding the correct information is not always easy, and determining whether the schemes are accessible to clients of social workers can be time-consuming and inconsistent.

The AASW continually builds relationships with many entities across Australia, advocating for social workers to be appropriately recognised and remunerated under relevant funding schemes. This ongoing work supports people needing resources and funding. It promotes social workers' skills, services, and value in diverse settings.

A new AASW resource has been developed as a quick reference guide for members wanting to provide services under specific funding schemes. The content of this "Social worker and funding schemes matrix" includes recognition within the scheme, eligibility and registration requirements, links to fee schedules, and other vital resources. The matrix can be found in Resources in the MyAASW member portal.

If you have any feedback or suggestions for extra funding schemes to be included, please email us on membership@aasw.asn.au.

JENNY RAVLIC
Business Support Advisor, AASW

Celebrating a remarkable journey



Kandie Allen-Kelly awarded AASW Life Membership

In a momentous event at the Annual General Meeting held on 9 November, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) bestowed Life Membership upon the exceptional Kandie Allen-Kelly. As we reflect on this honour, we are delighted to warmly welcome Kandie as the newest addition to our esteemed Life Members.

Kandie's impact on the AASW and social work has been profound. Her unwavering dedication spans over four decades, encompassing diverse realms such as direct practice, policy shaping, management, consultancy, and academia. Her journey has left a lasting mark on the profession.

Throughout her career, Kandie has exhibited extraordinary compassion and dedication. She has worked with survivors of harrowing experiences, offering solace to bereaved parents and extending empathy to individuals grappling with mental health challenges and specific health issues. Her efforts include over a decade of service in the rural regions of Queensland, where she fostered resilience and community empowerment.

As an academic, Kandie illuminated the paths of countless students, serving as a mentor, lecturer, Field Education Coordinator, and Head of School in well-regarded institutions such as James Cook University and ACU Canberra. Her scholarly pursuits, including a Master of Philosophy from ACU and substantial contributions to esteemed journals, have positioned her as a thought leader. In 2008, she authored a seminal book, further solidifying her status as an influential figure.

Kandie's leadership as the AASW CEO from 2007 to 2011 is a testament to her tenacity and advocacy. During her tenure, she spearheaded a pivotal campaign that successfully reversed the Australian Federal Government's decision, initially excluding social workers from the federally funded Medicare (Better Access) Program. This action significantly improved the standing of the profession.

Her enduring commitment to justice and equity has left an indelible legacy within the profession.

Kandie's appointment as a Life Member of AASW is a well-deserved recognition of the impact she has made and continues to make in social work. Congratulations, Kandie, and may this honour reflect our deep gratitude for your exceptional contributions.

AASW National Excellence Awards for 2023

Celebrating outstanding achievements in social work

A significant highlight during the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 9 November was the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) unveiling of the recipients of the AASW National Excellence Awards for 2023.

These outstanding individuals showcased remarkable dedication, innovation, and leadership in their respective fields, leaving a lasting impact on the social work profession. This marked the third year of the AASW National Excellence Awards, and the organisation was once again impressed by the high calibre of nominations received, reflecting the ongoing commitment of social workers to transformative and impactful practices.



SOCIAL WORK STUDENT OF THE YEAR

Morgan Shepherd

The recipient of the Social Work Student of the Year award was Morgan Shepherd, a dedicated second-year Master of Social Work student at the Australian Catholic University. Morgan's winning essay made a profound impact on assessors with its comprehensive analysis of gaps in the current Medicare Benefits Scheme. The paper showcased exceptional leadership, ethical reasoning, and practical recommendations, underlining Morgan's commitment to social justice and advocating for the rights of marginalised communities.



SOCIAL WORK RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR

Dr Gerard Jefferies

Dr Gerard Jefferies received the Social Work Researcher of the Year award for his remarkable contributions to Social Work education. His paper, "Using Simulation to Prepare Social Work Students for Field Education", demonstrated innovation in social work education, providing an evidence-based approach to improving the skills of students before they encounter real-world complexities in practice.



NATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS



ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL WORKER OF THE YEAR

Rowena Lawrie

Rowena Lawrie was awarded the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Worker of the Year for her unwavering commitment to advocating for clients and reshaping social policy. As the Director of Yamurrah, she led a diverse collective of First Nations clinicians and specialists, tirelessly advocating for the rights of First Nations clients. Rowena's exceptional leadership in decolonising social work practices and her active involvement in critical projects underscored her profound impact on the profession.



SOCIAL WORKER OF THE YEAR

Karen Green

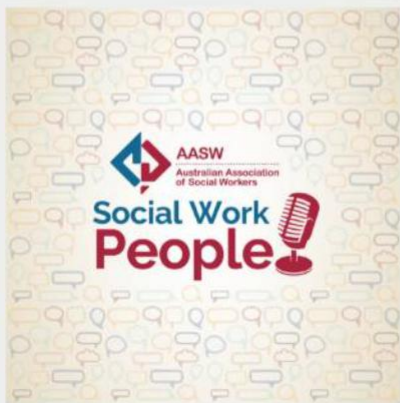
Karen Green received the prestigious Social Worker of the Year award for her outstanding contributions to suicide prevention in the military and veteran community. Her extensive delivery of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) workshops, active involvement in risk assessment and management plans, and co-editorship of the book *Military Social Work Around the Globe* highlighted her global impact and dedication to promoting international social work practices. Karen's exceptional leadership, including participation in programs like the Yale School of Management Women's Leadership Program, underscored her influence and positive image for the social work profession.

The AASW extends heartfelt congratulations to Morgan Shepherd, Dr Gerard Jefferies, Rowena Lawrie, and Karen Green for their outstanding achievements. These individuals exemplify the spirit of excellence in social work, inspiring their peers and making a significant impact on the lives of those they serve. The AASW looks forward to witnessing their continued successes and the positive influences they will undoubtedly have on the future of the social work profession.

Social Work People

Our AASW podcast

Have you discovered our podcast *Social Work People* yet?
It's available wherever you hear your podcasts.



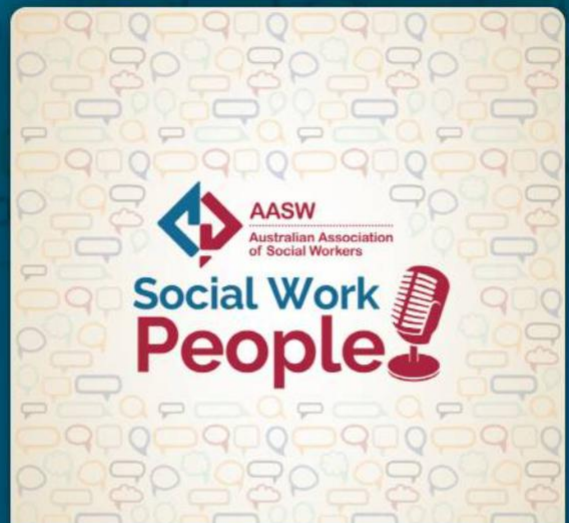
Every month, we introduce you to a social worker whose energy, thoughtfulness, and dedication to excellence are making an impact. For some of our guests, the unusual nature of their role makes the story; for others, it's the journey that brought them here, and for a few, the story comes from painful experience. They share their values, determination to make a difference, and commitment to professional growth. *Social Work People* will remind you why you became a social worker and connect you with how social workers are making a difference.

If you or someone you know has a story of the unexpected paths our work takes us, these might be the ingredients for an episode. Get in touch at [angela.scarfe@aasw.asn.au](mailto:angela.scarfe@<u>aasw.asn.au</u>).

ANGELA SCARFE
Senior Policy Advisor, AASW

 New episodes drop on the first
Wednesday of the month

LISTEN TO THE AASW'S OFFICIAL PODCAST



Social Work People explores the diverse world of social work and connects listeners to the people driving change and providing advocacy on the issues that impact upon the quality of life of all Australians.

LISTEN NOW

Reflection on the Online Health Symposium 2023

Practice Innovations, Challenges and Leadership in Social Work Health Care, 16 November

The resounding success of our recent Symposium, themed “Practice Innovations, Challenges, and Leadership in Social Work Health Care”, stands as a testament to our community’s dedication and collaborative spirit. It surpassed expectations in a myriad of ways.

The comprehensive program, meticulously woven together by the program committee, showcased thoughtful, engaging, and thought-provoking presentations. Through their dedicated efforts, we explored diverse topics and delved into the evolving landscape of social work in healthcare.

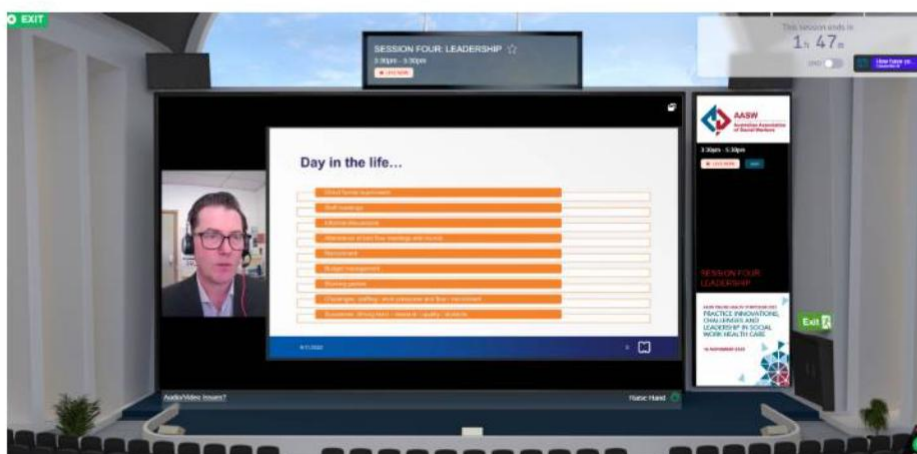
Reflecting on the day’s discussions, several key themes and insights emerged. The Symposium provided a platform for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness within various domains of social work in the health sector. It facilitated an exchange of ideas, revealed the intricate details of ongoing work in our profession, and shed light on innovative strategies and persistent challenges that will continue to shape our field.

Delving into specific topics, one noteworthy discussion focused on “Emerging Practice Tertiary Health–Navigating Complex Care”. It emphasised the necessity of adopting person-centred models in social work, particularly addressing unmet needs in oncology social work through comprehensive navigation strategies. The emphasis on critical thinking and collaborative advocacy underscored the need for innovative approaches in our roles.

Climate change and social work intersection highlighted the imperative for eco-social perspectives and integrating climate-change interventions into practice. It reiterated the pivotal role social workers play in mitigating the impact of climate change on service users’ health.

The Symposium also emphasised that leadership in social work is a catalyst for positive change, influencing the needs and rights of service users. Expert speakers shared inspiring journeys that serve as a beacon for aspiring social workers, illustrating the growth opportunities available within the sector.

Overall, the Symposium covered a lot of ground and left us feeling more innovative, more motivated, and more connected. It showed how committed we all are to advancing social work in healthcare.





Vale

Jill Wilson (1946–2023)

The AASW would like to pay tribute to Emeritus Professor Jill Wilson. Her impact on social work and academia and her unwavering dedication to others will forever resonate within the hearts of those she touched. Jill has been a long-term passionate member of the AASW and has participated in the College Review, and countless advisory panels. It is fitting she was named one of the first Fellows of the AASW.

Jill's journey began on a farm in the Dawson Valley, shaping her into a person of simplicity and resilience, and a person who showed genuine rapport with everyone she encountered. Her academic pursuit at the University of Queensland (UQ) in 1965 laid the groundwork for an illustrious career spanning continents and decades.

Her remarkable journey was marked by milestones—a Bachelor of Social Studies, time spent abroad, a Master's and a Doctorate. In 2003, she assumed leadership roles, leaving an indelible

mark as the Head of UQ's School of Social Work and Applied Human Services and later as the Acting Head of the School of Nursing, Midwifery, and Social Work.

In 2004, Jill was recognised with an Order of Australia for her commitment to community service and to pioneering models of care—and these have stood as a testament to her dedication.

Jill's legacy is far-reaching: a repository of over 100 publications, mentorship of numerous research students, and her

expertise in combating elder abuse, notably financial abuse. Her approach, characterised by openness and a unique balance between idealism and pragmatism, set her apart.

Jill's impact transcended borders, leaving an enduring mark on Australian and global societies. In honouring Jill Wilson, let us cherish her unwavering spirit, dedication to creating a better world, and the profound legacy she leaves behind—she is truly an inspiration for future generations.

Navigating ethics in social work

Understanding and upholding standards

At its core, social work is about fostering positive change and support within communities. This profession comes with a responsibility—an ethical framework that guides every decision and action. Understanding these ethical standards is crucial for social workers to navigate the complex terrain of their roles effectively. Did you know that the AASW received 79 ethics complaints in the last financial year, and over 1,000 Ethics and Practice Standards consultations were provided to members?

WHAT ETHICS MEAN IN SOCIAL WORK

Ethics are the guidelines and principles societies and professional groups establish over time. In social work, ethics serve as a compass, directing practitioners on the right path when faced with challenging decisions. These codes of conduct ensure that social workers maintain integrity, professionalism, and respect in their interactions and interventions.

Consider these three crucial areas to enhance your professional practice:

- 1. Seek professional supervision** from a certified social worker through AASW's diverse mentorship options. Whether you're navigating uncharted territory with new clients or seeking support, these resources can provide invaluable guidance and insight.
- 2. Ensure you have adequate training tailored to your specific social work domain.** Explore the accredited courses and continuing professional development opportunities on the AASW website to stay current and proficient in your field.
- 3. Make sure you are working within your scope of practice and practising safely.** Social workers are guided by three core ethical principles: respect for persons, social justice, and professional integrity. These principles underpin every action social workers take, emphasising the importance of treating individuals with dignity, advocating for fairness, and upholding honesty and accountability in their practice.



SEEKING GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Understanding and upholding ethical standards are fundamental pillars of effective social work practice. By adhering to these principles and codes of conduct, social workers contribute to the betterment of society while safeguarding the integrity of their profession.

Social workers at the AASW assist those seeking help and fellow practitioners facing difficult choices. We aim to guide and support decision-making processes in adherence to ethical standards. Feel free to reach out to us for assistance and guidance whenever needed.

For access to our code of ethics, please visit [Code of Ethics](#).

If you have ethical concerns or require additional support, please reach out to experts at (03) 9320 1000.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Fourteen things to consider when working with Aboriginal adolescents

AJ WILLIAMS-TCHEN

Dive into the complexities of working with Aboriginal adolescents with this insightful article tailored for social workers. As the future Elders and leaders of their communities, understanding the unique cultural and trauma-informed needs of First Nations youth is a key. With practical tips on communication, addressing casual racism, and utilising strength-based language, this guide, from AJ Williams-Tchen, equips social workers to support this generation, grappling with historical traumas and the contemporary impacts of colonisation.

Aboriginal adolescents are our future Elders and leaders, so we must ensure we are culturally appropriate and trauma-informed when we are interacting with First Nations youth.



About the author

AJ Williams-Tchen is of Wiradjuri background. He has been a social worker for 25 years working in the areas of reconciliation, mental health, mentoring and eating disorders.

He was awarded the AASW 2021 Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Worker of the Year, and in 2022 took out the Swinburne University Alumni Award for Social Impact, and two Victorian University Alumni Awards for Professional Achievement and for the Spirit of VU.

1. It is essential to understand that according to the ABS 2021 census, 54% of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander population is under 25. That's more than half the population.
2. In this population group, there are often two generations of family members, with a vast number of First Nations women having children themselves by the age of 22.
3. In 2022, there were 178,000 children under 18, with 46,000 in out-of-home care, often living in non-family environments. In other words, 42.8% of children aged 0-17 years old in out-of-home care were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander—an increase of 2.8% since 2019.
4. In the differing communities across Australia, there are different ages when initiation ceremonies may occur, transitioning a person from childhood to adulthood, meaning that a period of adolescence or its equivalent does not exist as it does in Western societies. The early onset of parenthood may also change when a person is viewed as an adult.
5. Not all Aboriginal young people are connected to their language group or know what language group theirs is. This may result from parents not growing up in a culture with that knowledge or because they have been living in out-of-home care. Generationally, we have seen many families in and out of the child protection, juvenile justice, and prison systems.

6. It is essential to understand the above so that we become aware of some of the trauma trigger statements we may use without meaning to. For example, simple greetings such as "Who is your mob?" or "How's your family?" may trigger people with little access or knowledge because of their life experiences.
7. Listen to how the young person describes themselves or aspects of their Aboriginality. Some prefer the term "Aboriginal", others a local term such as "koorie" (south-eastern Australia), "Palawa" (Tasmanian) or "Murrie" (Queensland). Some prefer the term "First Nations" or "Indigenous", while others may acknowledge their cultural ties to a particular clan, mob, or language group, such as "Yorta Yorta", "Wiradjuri" or "unjulong".
8. Aboriginal people often work from a community-family-individual model, which differs from the Western models of individual-family-community. Talking about themselves up front may cause some young people "shame" or embarrassment. Making them the centre of attention, asking direct questions, or forcing them to lead conversations about themselves can be difficult. It is best, at times, to use community-based questions such as "Tell me who you live with?" and "In your family, who do you admire, and why?"
9. Understand that some families may appear to be "functionally dysfunctional" or "dysfunctionally functional". Remember that they are functioning, and as social workers, try to understand how this family works rather than dysfunctions.
10. Research has shown that this is often the first generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to get to Year 12. According to the latest ABS census, only 56% of 20-24-year-olds report completing Year 12. This shows that almost half do not. It is hard to close the employment and higher education gaps when our kids are just getting to Year 12.
11. Discussions around identity need to be taken with care and take into account the casual racism that many "light-skinned" Aboriginal young people face when being questioned about their Aboriginality. "What percentage are you Aboriginal?", "You don't look Aboriginal", and "How far back does your Aboriginality go?" are inappropriate. The national data collection guidelines state that the question "Are you Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?" is the most appropriate way to ascertain a person's Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. If they answer "yes", a simple "thank-you" will suffice, or you could ask, "Do you identify with any particular language group?" Again, if they say "no", respect this as their answer. If they acknowledge their language group, later do some research (the internet is excellent) and learn more about where their mob or ancestry comes from.
12. Don't expect the Aboriginal young person to be an expert in all issues around First Nations culture, history, or current politics. Many are just learning about this themselves. Expecting them to provide you with free cultural awareness or a cultural interpretation is not on.





13. Using as many strengths-based words when working with young First Nations youth is vital for self-esteem, self-resilience, and self-worth.

14. Working with a trauma-informed framework also involves acknowledging and recognising where the trauma originates from. Colonisation and Stolen Generations may have started the trauma, but take into account all of the above, as this is where current traumas exist.

These are just a few things to consider when practising social work with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system, [https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area12/out-of-home-care#:~:text=Proportion of children aged 0, points since 2019\(figure%20SE12b](https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area12/out-of-home-care#:~:text=Proportion of children aged 0, points since 2019(figure%20SE12b)

Engaging vulnerable young people in planning and reviewing their own care

MyView myWay: Combining digital technology and strengths-based practice

JUDITH GARSED

This article addresses a crucial aspect of child protection and social work in the context of the newly launched National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. It is invaluable to social workers as it provides practical insights and a structured framework to enhance engagement and support for young people in the child protection system.



About the author

Judith Garsed is an internationally experienced social worker, trainer and committed campaigner for young people in the care system. She is a Director of The Viewpoint Organisation and recently retired as Western Australia's dedicated Advocate for Children in Care. Contact Judith@theviewpointorg.onmicrosoft.com

For more information about Viewpoint's myView myWay, please contact Judith.

Minister for Social Services Amanda Rishworth launched the new [National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children](#) in January this year. Focusing on safety and support, the Framework aims to achieve systems reform through better integration and coordination of policies and programs, as well as a shift to early intervention and targeted support. While one of the primary goals is to avoid the need for child protection interventions, an underpinning principle is to ensure that when they do need such interventions, solutions are child-centered and informed by their voices and the voices of those who care for them.

Workers on the ground in child protection organisations, however, can face significant challenges in engaging and empowering young clients whose trauma histories create mistrust of adults and systems and result in barriers to participation.

A combination of digital technology and strengths-based practice developed by The Viewpoint Organisation in the myView myWay program has been effective in a

range of jurisdictions in helping young people to overcome barriers to participation and to identify and express views, feelings, and aspirations to form the seminal focus of the care planning process and help them to achieve their full potential.

VIEWPOINT AUDIO COMPUTER-ASSISTED SELF INTERVIEWING (ACASI)

Viewpoint's engaging digital assessment tools make it easier for young people to communicate. The use of familiar digital devices such as tablets or phones together with contemporary technology, colourful backgrounds, avatars, and a read-out-loud capability can overcome initial resistance and literacy barriers. In this way, hard-to-reach populations like young people with a trauma history can be engaged and encouraged to complete self-assessments that explore and provide information in a safe, easy, and confidential environment. Young people often comment that they can write down their thoughts and feelings better



than they can say them. Questions such as “Do you have any hobbies or special interests?” and “Do you feel you have something you are good at?” provide opportunities for positives and aspirations to be identified. The tool allows the young person to say what is going well and not so well in their lives. The self-assessment questionnaires explore all dimensions of the young person’s experiences and provide the foundation for planning in a way that is relevant and meaningful for them.

STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE

Once self-assessments have been completed, face-to-face follow-up by the worker using strengths-based practice explores and expands on responses, inspiring a dynamic and collaborative process for the development of proposals which address the young person’s worries and concerns, and which support them in achieving their personal goals based upon their identified strengths and aspirations. Proposals developed in this way create the focus for the upcoming formal planning or review forum and can be presented in the

young person’s medium of choice, e.g. written formats, pictures, videos, or other presentations.

MyView myWay moves away from a deficit-based orientation that asks “What’s going wrong?” and “What do we need to fix about you?” The strengths-based starting point is listening to what young people need in order to flourish. Recent evidence (Scerra, N., 2012) supports the use of strengths-based practice to achieve improved engagement and positive outcomes for children and families in a variety of practice settings.

PRIORITISING NEEDS AND GOALS

Prioritising actions is a vital part of the process in the conversation about self-assessment responses. The worker’s assumptions are subjective and may not be accurate.

IDENTIFYING KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Quality relationships between the young person and those providing support are critical in achieving the young person’s goals and potential.

The myView myWay process itself reinforces a personal connection between the individual and the worker, allowing the young person to see that their worker hears them, values them, and understands their needs. Other critical relationships are also identified through the self-assessment and can be enabled in the care plan. Aside from parents and carers, there are many stories of a teacher or another professional in a child’s life providing a key relationship that has helped the child to recover. These are vital relationships that must be empowered.

THE CARE PLAN

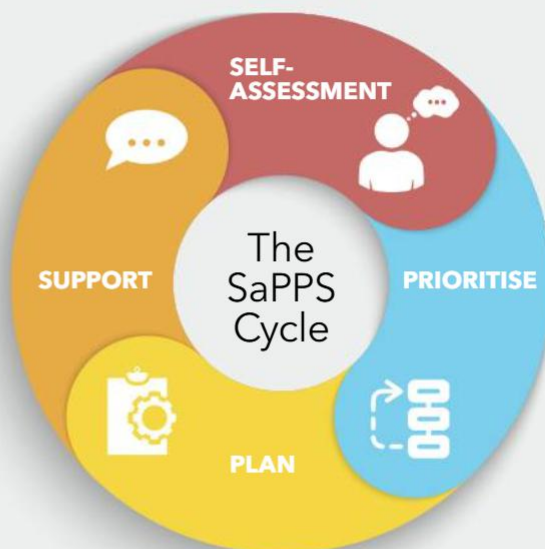
The resulting care plan or review will be genuinely influenced by the young person’s agenda and priorities and will reflect the goals, solutions, and requests they have identified. They are most likely to achieve the desired outcomes when they are connected and committed to the plan. The experience of genuine participation promotes in them a sense of control over their lives, feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, an emphasis on strengths and talents,

and the reduction of negative notions about self.

The care plan or review meeting will be guided by the question “What do we need to do to support the young person’s development, learning, stability, and growth, as well as their healing?” This way of working places the child’s best interests and needs as the central focus. Working this with young people creates the opportunity for them to be co-producers of services and support rather than simply consumers of those services.

THE SaPPS CYCLE

MyView myWay introduces the SaPPS cycle as a strengths-based approach to practice. It provides a structure and framework for practitioners and supervisors to follow:



THE ROLES OF THE CASE WORKER AND SUPERVISOR

Once the person-focused care plan is in place, there is clarity for the worker in relation to the casework to be done in the period ahead, and for the supervisor to monitor resourcing these activities and outcomes.

The worker’s responsibilities encompass overall case management and coordination of care team activities (i.e. involving those with a role or contribution to make in the child’s life). Critical tasks also include building a connection and effective helping relationship with the young person, listening to and valuing their views; facilitating and supporting the natural connections in the young person’s network; supporting the young person in their care arrangement; instigating continuous

and collaborative reassessment with the young person so they can reflect on their circumstances, changes, and developments over time; highlighting achievements to promote the young person’s sense of empowerment, self-confidence, and self-worth; and helping the young person contribute to future reviews which consider, record, and build upon achievements.

IMPLEMENTING myView myWay

The myView myWay approach is easy to implement. It introduces a digital medium with which young people are increasingly familiar and which facilitates their engagement in candid self-assessment to identify talents and aspirations, as well as worries and concerns. Responses can be displayed immediately on devices, providing the basis for follow-up conversations between the worker and the young person at the time or soon afterwards.

Strengths-based practice is designed to enhance and protect the individual’s independence, resilience, ability to make choices, and general wellbeing. The approach allows for young people to see themselves at their best in order to appreciate their value and then to move that value forward and capitalise on their strengths rather than focus on negative characteristics.

The combination of ACASI and strengths-based practice creates a dynamic environment in which young people and members of their care teams can work together to achieve goals and improve outcomes for vulnerable individuals who have learned what it means to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives.

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The benefits of international exchange

SIN-YING TAN

In this informative article, we delve into the transformative experiences of a social work professional who participated in the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP) in Austria, facilitated by the Council of International Fellowship (CIF). Particularly intriguing is the comparison of mental health services between Austria and Australia, prompting valuable reflections on the potential applicability of varied approaches in the face of workforce shortages. Social workers keen on expanding their global perspectives and enhancing their professional practice will find this a testament to the benefits of international exchange.

Early this year, I had the opportunity to go to Austria through the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP), run by the Council of International Fellowship (CIF). The program's overarching goal is to promote professional, cross-cultural, and educational exchange for individuals working in the social services field. CIF Austria has run a yearly program since the spring of 1989. I was lucky enough to be one of the six participants in this year's program, which lasted 19 days. The other participants were from India, Estonia, Greece, Turkey, and Spain.

Upon my arrival in Vienna, all the participants were taken to Schoderleh, a countryside near Vienna, where we spent the first few days together to get to know each other and many CIF Austria members. There were numerous opportunities for all participants to share information about the culture and social welfare of their home country and the field of practice that they are in. During our time in Schoderleh, we were given lectures on social work education, social welfare, and social policy in Vienna. For the rest of the program, we were placed individually with a homestay host or hosts, where

we experienced the local customs and exchanged cultural experiences.

Central to all CIF IPEP programs are the agency field visits. I am very grateful to all the CIF Austria committee members who negotiated a range of field visits around Vienna for us. As part of the general program, we visited various agencies around Vienna, where we met staff from the respective agencies and learned about what they do. There were plenty of opportunities to explore the differences and similarities in practice with each other. We visited a 24-hour women's service, a youth welfare office, family violence services, mental health services, and the parliament, just to name a few. In my three-day individual program, I was fortunate enough to spend two days in Linz, Upper Austria, where I visited an AOD (Alcohol and Other Drugs) service, a mental health unit in a hospital, a learning centre for educationally disadvantaged young people, and an activities centre for people with lived experience of mental health. On the last day of my program, I returned to Vienna. I visited an agency equivalent to the Office of the Public Advocate in Victoria and a not-for-profit organisation providing mental health



About the author

Sin-Ying Tan is an accredited social worker, who currently works in a public mental health service in Melbourne. Since completing her social work degree, she has worked in various fields of practice including family services, family violence, general health, and mental health.

I highly recommend the CIF program to social workers interested in engaging in transformative learning and increasing cultural humility

rehabilitation. As CIF Austria has close cooperation with the Department for Social Work, University of Applied Sciences, we had the opportunity to meet with staff and students on various occasions to exchange our experience and expertise and for the students to share their research projects and placement experiences.

In this program, I learned differences in what social workers can do in mental health services. For example, Austrian social workers are only able to provide psychological strategies to individuals that they work with if they have completed further education in psychotherapy (although they will be known as psychotherapists then). Austrian social workers in public mental health cannot initiate compulsory mental health treatment. As per their Mental Health Act, only a medical practitioner from a public health service or police department, regardless of their specialisation, can do so. How could this work in Australia, especially with workforce shortages? Would we want to do this in Australia?

The program was rather intense; however, it was enriching. Immersion in other cultures' social work practice challenged my assumptions and beliefs. Furthermore, it encouraged me to reflect on my practice and how I could integrate my new knowledge into my everyday work. It also has broadened my horizon in fields of practice that I pay little to no attention to, such as child poverty and female genital mutilation. I highly recommend the CIF program to social workers interested in engaging in transformative learning and increasing cultural humility.



Schoderleh
From the left:
Sarita Ganesh
(India);
Merje Servet
(Estonia);
Murat Öz (Turkey);
Sofia Garcia (Spain);
Sin-Ying Tan
(Australia);
Efthymia Katsantoni
(Greece)



University of Applied science
From the left:
Efthymia Katsantoni
(Greece);
Merje Servet
(Estonia);
Sarita Ganesh
(India);
Murat Öz (Turkey);
Sofia Garcia (Spain);
Sin-Ying Tan
(Australia)

Confidently authentic

Staying true in the face of systemic struggles

EMILY BURROWS

In pursuing authentic and impactful social work, this article explores the challenges social workers face within a system that often seems at odds with their mission. Drawing on personal experiences and insights gained over 15 years in the field, Emily Burrows reflects on the daily practice of maintaining the core values of the social work profession in the face of systemic obstacles, making it a helpful resource for fellow practitioners seeking inspiration and resilience.



About the author

Emily Burrows is a Clinical Senior Social Worker with 15 years' experience in health, in various roles from clinical to project to leadership. Currently, Emily works in a leadership role with a small team in regional health, working clinically and providing supervision.

How do we, as social workers, find ways to take heart and keep showing up in a system that sometimes feels like it's working against us?

As social work students, we learn about the influence of sociopolitical systems on the organisations we work in. At the time, I didn't truly understand, and I remember my dear dad having to explain the nuances to me patiently. Fifteen years later, I got it as a social worker with years of varied work experience from clinical to project to leadership work. It is a daily practice to find ways to stay true to the core of my social work profession in a system that often doesn't meet the needs of those it professes to serve.

I attended a training session with Kent Hoffman (psychotherapist and Circle of Security Project) some years ago. He speaks of infinite worth and states, "Every human being you will ever meet has infinite worth." I am moved every time I listen to this and am reminded of the human condition, an absolute leveller, and one we all share. This supports me to sit with the distressing and challenging stories, to sit with those whom others have labelled "difficult to be with", and to sit within the systems we work in. We are all in this together.

Another training session I recently attended at the Humane Clinic in Adelaide, run by psychotherapists (one of whom is a fantastic social worker, Rory, who was nominated for an AASW award this year), reminds us of the power of staying with another's story and that genuinely being with another as they tell you their story is a gift both for the storyteller and the listener. The premise of this course is lovely to a social worker, with the notion that listening, connecting, and being with



Every human being you will ever meet has infinite worth.





another in an intentional way offers justice.

A woman I currently have the privilege of working with (I shall call her Sarah) wanted to tell me her story. I knew it would be painful for her to share, and at certain moments, I told her that she did not have to share this, or that she could stop when she needed to. Sarah spoke for a full hour with me listening. She shared a harrowing story that sits with me as I write this. I felt honoured she chose me to hear. Was it just that I happened to be the social worker in the right place at the right time, or did I convey to her that I could be trusted with this? On reflecting on this, I found that she didn't need me to ask questions—she needed me to be present and truly listening. I barely said a word. I was again reminded of the worth of being with and bearing witness. I know Sarah waited until she knew I could hold what she shared. She didn't need me to "fix it". I couldn't "fix it". She needed me to listen. Sometimes, it's the most minor things that hold the most meaning.

I invite you all to pause and take a moment in what can be very challenging work to reflect on what supports you to keep showing up for those who need us the most.

"Respectfully fearless" is how a colleague recently described me. This is an apt description that has, upon reflection, delighted me and is inextricably connected to me as a social worker.

This stance helps me respectfully (with a sprinkle of fearlessness) show up for those I serve and quietly disrupt the system to pursue more remarkable outcomes for those who need us the most.

-

From communication woes to holistic healing

The role of social workers in couples therapy

EMILY BIEBER

In this article a seasoned social worker and couples counsellor passionately explores the transformative potential of social work skills in addressing the complex dynamics of romantic relationships. Emily advocates for social workers to actively engage in couples therapy, emphasising the profession's unique ability to provide holistic and multi-dimensional support. Emily's article serves as a compelling guide for fellow social workers, challenging misconceptions and illustrating the vital role they can play in fostering healing and connection within couples.



About the author

Emily Bieber lives with her husband and three children. She is a private counsellor in Melbourne and social work lecturer at La Trobe University. She loves bringing real stories into the classroom. Emily is exploring the case for expansion of affordable couples therapy into Medicare. You can reach her at e.bieber@latrobe.edu.au

Social work training forms an excellent foundation for effective couples counselling. We bring multi-angle assessment and intervention capability. Senior practitioners have the knowledge to take the lead. Let's not restrict ourselves to referring on; let's do the work ourselves! As a recipient of talk therapy myself, I am still taken aback when I meet clients who have never had any counselling before. For couples, work to be someone's first time in the hot seat is both an exciting opportunity and extra-delicate work. For some, it's scary and for others, it's a relief knowing help is at hand. Couples counselling can open the door to numerous successes.

My name is Emily. I'm a social worker with a background in case management across various fields (homelessness, mental health, family support, and student counselling). About two years ago, I stepped into couples counselling, and I love it. I also had a lightbulb moment: I'm suddenly curious about the power of couples therapy. Initially, I felt that couples work was not the domain of social workers, and I'm proving myself

wrong: experienced social practitioners are well suited to this activity. In writing this piece, I want to share with my fellow comrades that couples work is not a mysterious beast. If anything, it sits comfortably in our work that strives to support families and individuals to reach safety and wellbeing.

The classic reason for accessing couples therapy is the problem of "we aren't getting along anymore". I argue for social workers to take ownership of this important work because the conversation quickly turns to an underlying range of important social challenges:

- life stages including parenthood and retirement
- verbal abuse and being stuck in an arguing cycle
- fertility and associated grief
- differing approaches to parenting
- problems with sex—including initiation and frequency
- blending families

- poor health (physical, mental) of one or both partners
- loss of trust after affairs
- balancing work life and family life
- separated couples living together.

To start wading through these issues and providing strong support and meaningful intervention, there are essential skills one requires before moving into this work.

These skills interleave well with traditional social work values and knowledge. These include:

- counselling skills: including holding the space firmly, and enabling both parties to speak
- family violence assessment skills, before and during the work
- understanding eco and family systems theories
- a strong connection to feminist values
- knowledge of developmental milestones
- the capacity to reflect on your own relationships
- an understanding of attachment styles
- the ability to talk knowledgeably about sex, without laughing hysterically
- a willingness to support clients with navigation of health and welfare systems.

Knowing that we have the skills listed above, it starts to become clearer why social workers are so well suited to couples work. Couples don't always know it when they enter my office, but soon realise they are getting a holistic service. Typically, couples, whether they are married, de facto, gay or straight, enter the room with "communication problems". And sometimes they are right. But often they're only hitting the tip of the iceberg and neglecting to raise more

urgent or concrete matters. We social workers are so well suited to couples work because our broad assessment skills mean that we can cover a range of important topics quickly and skilfully. Let me share some skills for some winning moves that I've been using with the hope to quickly put out some fires.

SAFETY

Thank goodness for Rosie Batty, CRAF, MARAM, the Safe & Together model and all my former bosses who pulled me into the world of family violence prevention and safety planning. As a junior social worker in the early 2000s, family violence was not strongly on my radar. But things are improving. Community awareness is expanding, and client knowledge is growing. Not all couples are suited to counselling if there is imminent and serious danger. Always screen for this before you begin, and at intervals. Start the sessions by ensuring you have the contact details of both parties, and they have yours. Discuss the law: their rights and responsibilities. Discuss a safety plan for difficult times including bickering and yelling. Using Dan Siegel's hand model of the brain, or a traffic light (zones of regulation) diagram, spend time on ensuring there is a "time out" safety system for everyone in the family. Once safety is established, further work can continue.

HEALTH

Couples want to mend their communication issues, but let's add sleep deprivation, addiction, substance addiction, work stress, untreated physical impairments, and undiagnosed neurodiversity. What's exciting about social work and couples therapy is that a skilful practitioner can hold and support a couple until specialist help arrives. Using transparency, you can check on sleep hygiene, diet, alcohol/drug intake and work hours. I've been burnt enough times in the past with moving towards practical solutions, only to learn that the husband has chronic pain, or the wife has run out of her prescription. It's a social worker's broad knowledge base that makes these assessments and interventions work.

SEX

We talk about consensual sex, coercive sex, fun sex, and intimacy. There's nothing quite like asking a direct question about how sex is initiated. Often the answer is "I make a move and see if she receives it" or "I'm dropping hints all week with no outcome!" Teach couples to switch to "Hey Steven, after we've washed the dishes, shall we go upstairs and have sex?" or "Hunny, I think I'd like us to hold hands at the market on Friday". Be sure to ask some super specific questions about routines around sex and intimacy (and tell them there IS a difference!). Make the space strong and safe, then ask the big questions using a combination of anatomically correct language and their language. It may draw light to something that's been happening for years but has never been previously discussed.

These themes are only a component of the work, but if my couples are unsafe and unwell, it makes the job of fixing initial “communication problems” even harder. A skilful social worker can get some strong wins on the board: using a directive manner, I set homework of watching telly together and speaking kindly to one another. By brainstorming as a team, we address parenting challenges. I can give psychoeducation on parenting, mental health, sleep hygiene, budgeting, service navigation, retirement, feminism, and nutrition. Clients can end name-calling, quit having transactional or coercive sex, end the put-downs, and learn to appreciate one another’s abilities, shortcomings, and traumas. There are loads of healing to be done and social workers clearly bring the right ingredients.

The limitation to this work, however, is the cost. If social workers, who traditionally work with low

socioeconomic communities are to step towards couples counselling, we need more than a confidence boost. We need funding reform. Couples counselling is expensive: I charge 10% of the average weekly wage* for one session. And those that can see me are arriving often at my office many years too late.

So, where to next? Let’s work out how to provide accessible couples therapy to middle- and low-income earners. The ABC’s Zilla Gordon reported on 12 November 2022** that as the cost of living rises alongside divorce rates, there’s an increasing trend of separated couples living under the same roof. As social workers, we can agitate to put couples therapy into Medicare. And as social workers we can start having braver conversations.

*ABS <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/may-2023>

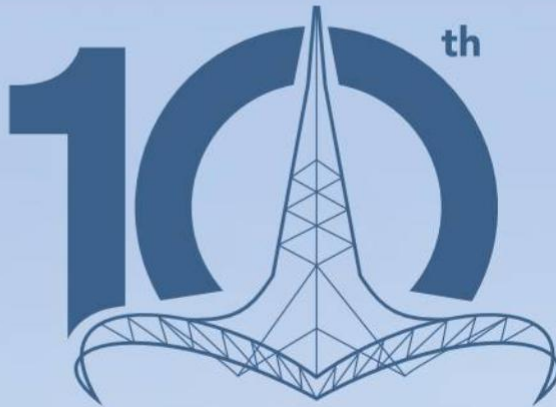
** <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-12/cost-of-living-forces-exes-to-live-together-in-melbourne/101644142>





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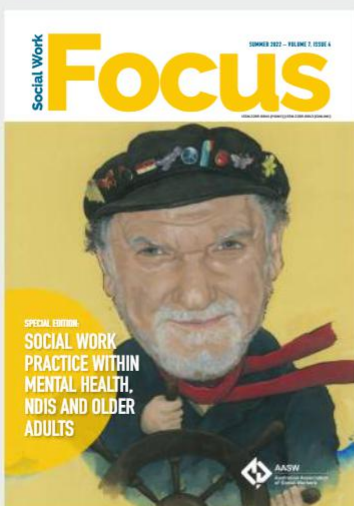
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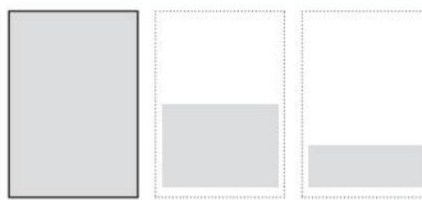
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