



Social Work in the Hunter: 30 years young

The Hunter Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) celebrates its 30th anniversary this week with a celebration dinner at Newcastle's well known Noah's on the Beach tomorrow (Thursday 13 August).

"We are expecting around eighty members, both past and present, to attend the dinner," said Mr David McNamara, the President of the Hunter Branch. The National President of the AASW, Professor Bob Lonne, will also attend.

The Hunter Branch was established in May 1979 by a local group of social workers keen to establish a local branch and a School of Social Work at the University of Newcastle. The Bachelor of Social Work course commenced in 1991.

The Hunter Branch is one of the smaller AASW Branches with around 120 members. "But we retain a proud independence and the 'can do' Novocastrian attitude," said Mr McNamara.

Social Workers work with people of all ages in a range of settings including: hospitals, community health centres, mental health, drug and alcohol services, migrant health, income support, child protection, sexual assault, domestic violence, management, training, social policy and, increasingly, private practice.

Social Workers undertake at least four years of university study, including 140 days of work place experience. "Social work is a profession concerned with human rights and social justice, and social workers are trained to assist people to pursue personal and social wellbeing," said Mr McNamara.

Grace Parbery (1913-1993) was a pioneer social worker in the Hunter. Grace came to work at the Royal Newcastle Hospital in 1947. She had previously worked for the Red Cross in the rehabilitation of Australian prisoners of war at the Army General Hospital in Goulburn. In 1955 Grace Parbery was instrumental in establishing a Domiciliary Care Service for the aged at the Royal Newcastle Hospital. This scheme was the forerunner of Home Care Australia and a model for aged care services throughout the nation. In 1986 Grace was awarded an OAM. Grace died in 1993.

The Grace Parbery Award was established by the Hunter Branch in 1994 to perpetuate the memory of an outstanding and highly respected Hunter social worker. The Award is conferred for outstanding achievement in a field of social work practice. The Award will be presented at the Anniversary Dinner.

Today there are more than two hundred social workers in the Hunter Region.