



## CONVENORS REPORT DECEMBER 2018

### *Beautiful Vehicle Requires New Drivers*

It's a bit like deciding to sell that old classic car you have loved and has given so much pleasure, but caused a fair bit of angst along the way. I am reflecting on my six years at the helm of VMHSW with mixed emotions as I step down from convenor role (as per AASW by-laws.) Overall it has been a good drive from taking the wheel when the AMHSW (as formed in 1981 as a Special Interest Group of the AASW) needed to change its name to avoid confusion with Accredited Mental Health Social Workers and officially became a Practice Group in 2012.

We have had many interesting journeys, delivering many well received training sessions and workshops at very affordable rates. These are primarily aimed at mental health social workers in AMHS & MHCSS, but also attracting many private practitioners. We have dispensed with membership fees, increased membership numbers and recognised those who have served with Lifetime Achievement Awards.

We have adapted the structure of what we provide, partly following the feedback we had from members, but also adapting to changing road conditions. So the evening seminar/workshops have moved to afternoon sessions, now based at AASW (Vic) offices. This has strengthened our links with the AASW branch office and also helps more members put a face to their professional body. These seminars for the last two years have followed a theme - last year 'New and Emerging Areas of Mental Health Social Work' and this year 'The Unique Contribution of Social Work to Mental Health Practice'. The seminars provided the entrée to the end of year 'Day Conferences', both extremely well attended with extremely good feedback as a celebration of social work.

However we have done this with an ever decreasing committee base, running with just five volunteers this last year (with absolutely essential valued backup support from AASW staff Rosanna and Anneka.) Despite 140 members, attendance of almost 100 at our three seminars in 2018 and attendance of over 100 at the 2018 Day Conference we have been unsuccessful recruiting new members to replace outgoing committee members. The group has had many social work luminaries involved at various stages. Names such as Mark Furlong & Christina Pead-Erbredis were instrumental in setting up the original group, Alice Berliner & Anne Maree Newbold recall Xeroxing (look it up) the newsletters - 'Negontropia' (look it up!) Bill Healey, Angela Obradovic, Shraevani Giri, John Mullane, Lisa Hebel & Noel Renouf to name but a few. It reads like a Hall of Fame of Victorian Mental Health Social Work.

The current committee leave an up to date log book with a healthy service history, the engine being tweaked to keep up with the changes in our environment. Last year we have held about half committee meetings by skype to allow access to those further afield. There are plans to look into Zoom or other improved platforms.

Our journeys include contributing to the development of policy (notably input to the Ten Year Mental Health Plan) and entering discussion with DHHS about workforce development. We have lobbied for the AASW Mental Health e-bulletin to be distributed to all mental health social workers not just those who are Accredited. The Practice Group has also strengthened links with schools of social work at Universities (including providing guest lectures) and has a representative on the National Working Group on Private Practice.

Unlike new cars, classics are an appreciating asset, there is a healthy bank balance. Foundations have been laid to look at developing a scholarship/ bursary scheme for student research programs. At the last Day Conference we offered a 'Special Consideration' registration for 5 students/ newly qualified social workers who in return for assisting with the running of the conference on the day were granted free registration.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the committee who have put in a lot of effort over the last few years maintaining and polishing this wonderful vehicle. Justine Grimmer (Secretary), Chelsea Phillips, as well as long standing members Carol Smith (former Secretary, former Treasurer) & Marti Block (Treasurer). 2019 promises to be a fascinating time for the Mental Health field. An imminent Royal Commission will no doubt reveal many of the deficits in the system we work in, but it should also offer the chance to look at the systemic issues which we know impact on all aspects of mental health. It is potentially a great opportunity for a motivated, energised social work force. I believe VMHSW may be the largest AASW practice group in Australia. As current custodians, we need to proactively reach out to passionate Mental Health Social Workers interested to take this Practice Group on its next journey. If you are ready to be part of it, members of the outgoing committee are very happy to support you in transition to your stewardship and take you for a test drive.

We look forward to hearing from you,

*Aroon Naidoo, Convenor, VMHSW.*

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