



Australian Association of Social Workers Inc. (Victorian Branch)
50th Anniversary Oral History Project
Transcript of Interview – Frances Donovan

Rosie

This is the tape of an interview with **Frances Donovan** who has followed a distinguished career in social work and related fields, and is currently semi-retired, still involved in consultancy and writing.

Frances will be speaking with me, Rosie Maddick, for the 50th Anniversary Oral History Project conducted by the Australian Association of Social Workers Inc. (Victorian Branch).

On behalf of the Association, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this program.

Frances, do you understand that copyright of this interview is shared by you and the Association?

Frances

Yes

Rosie

This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording?

Frances

Yes

Rosie

We hope you will speak as frankly as possible, knowing that neither the tapes nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority.

This interview is taking place today, the 13 August, 1996, at Montmorency.

Can I begin with asking you the reasons why you initially became interested in social work?

Frances

Yes, well that happens to be fairly complicated and I'll have to be anecdotal here. It was an atypical beginning. I was a teacher in the Education Department and I had at that time teacher qualifications and an Arts Degree. I saw in the paper that a new course was starting up at Melbourne University in Personnel Practice and I was particularly interested in that, largely because I felt, and had actually run foul of, what I thought was some of the poor personnel practices of the Education Department. There were confrontations over some issues there. I only quote it because it indicates that I had that sort of

approach right at the beginning.

I wasn't thinking of social work at all. However, at that stage, and a lot of people don't know this, Melbourne's Social Work Department was asked to set up a course in personnel practice. The reason they were asked to do that was that during the war (by the way this was just after the war), the government had made a ruling that every factory over a certain number had to have a welfare officer. Largely because in those days there was manpower control, people were being sent to places they didn't want to go, doing jobs they didn't want to do. There were a lot of problems. So they just looked around for someone to train welfare officers. They decided they would have a six months course and it was for industrial welfare officers to fulfill the regulations of the government during the war. They set up that course in social work, there was nowhere else they could think of doing it, when a lot of people said, "We need personnel training in the tertiary system" they said, "Where?" and they put it into social work.

The year I started I started as a personnel trainee, a person doing a personnel course in the social work department or Social Studies as it was called then. That was the only time the social work course had an equal number of men and women, because a whole lot of men came in to do the personnel course. I was the only woman doing it. All those men got diplomas in Social Studies (Dip. Soc. Studs.) and so did I. Some of them are still floating around but they were all my age of course, and not many of them are still around. A few of them went into social work afterwards. Some of them became interested in social work to some extent because they were forced, in the kind of course it was, to do a certain amount of social work training. One of them, for example, who was a personnel officer, is now retired, lives locally here, he was the one who was the President of the local North East Citizens Advocacy Committee and inducted me into that.

It's interesting how many years later that inadvertent course did produce some social workers and that's how I came into social work. Now how I came into social work. It was the first three year course by the way, the diploma had been two years up till then, so we were the first three year, 1947. We did the first two years so we were in fact social workers and were doing the same amount of social work as other people did for their social work training. There used to be an extra year for medical social work and that stopped then. We were the first three-year course, no specialties. The only specialty, strangely enough, was the personnel course. Everyone did a three year diploma of social studies but the personnel people hived off in the third year and did personnel subjects. Also we had to do a combined Commerce degree.

I had an Arts Degree and they allowed me not to do the full combined commerce, but I covered Economics 1, Economics 2, Applied Industrial Psychology after Psych 1 instead of the other psychologies that the social workers did. I studied Industrial Administration and Industrial Relations, and a subject called Personnel Practice. So I covered a lot of commerce subjects, actually I could've applied for a Diploma of Commerce if I had wanted to, there used to be a Diploma of Commerce, which I never did, I think I would've had to do one more subject. But I had an Arts Degree which meant that I had some spare spaces and I was able to do that combined commerce and they let me

off a few things I was fairly atypical even then. I did Dip. Soc. Studs, but intending to be a personnel officer, it was quite inadvertent that I went into social work. I finished off and I went into personnel and I was a personnel manager of a factory here, then I went to England, I worked in personnel in England.

However, the social work course was generic and I have a lot to say about that later. That meant that I studied casework, individual work. By the way, just to give you an idea, we had several fieldwork placements in three years. We started within one week. We had one week and then I went out to the Alfred Hospital in my first fieldwork placement. We had placements on vacations, every vacation and also a three-month placement at the end. I was at the Alfred Hospital, one placement at Red Cross; psychiatric clinic, with Dr Philips at Travencore, who was the man at the time. I had a number of social work field work placements in the first two years. As I said, we had fieldwork placements for three years, and three months at the end. I find it incredibly strange to think of somebody doing two placements only in the course.

As I say, we did them right from the beginning; talk about the poor clients, and who was thrown into what. I can remember every case of my first year placement at the Alfred, and when I think of it, I had suicides, I had incredibly difficult cases and this was right in the first term of the first year. Admittedly we were all older, there were ex-service people and I was older. We were a small group, only about eleven finished in the three years. There were a few who went straight through from school and they just dropped like flies. At the time we thought, "These ridiculous kids straight from school, fancy their coming into social work". At that stage many completed a B.A. Dip. Soc. Studs. combined, so they would've done one year of Arts and in that one year of Arts they did social biology. It was almost a four year course if you like, because you knew straight away if you were doing B.A. Dip. Soc. Studs. We thought the ones straight from school were just so naive, and I realise now, we were awful, we were not the least bit supportive and sympathetic to that tiny group. There were about five or six of them who were straight from school, because all the rest were these ex-servicemen who had seen life and let everyone know they had 'seen life'. Also somebody like myself who had taught in a country town had 'seen life', because I had taught during the war and all sorts of things were happening. Apart from everything else I had seen life in the sense that I had lost a brother in the War. We regarded ourselves as relatively mature, I think I was about 23 at the time, 1947, born in 1923, 24 years old. So the ones straight from school, the 19 year olds, were a minority and they dropped like flies, so what finished were this very self confident, mature group who survived and they were very atypical.

We started a journal, which we called 'Self Determination'. I was chairman of the Student's Society. We had conferences that we went away for; organised them. We had a staff/student committee, and I remember I was the student rep on the Staff/Student Committee. So obviously I was asserting myself then, I wasn't so aware of it in the sense that we were all a fairly assertive group, but it would never have occurred to me not to be assertive. Because I came from a background that expected it, there were no expectations that as a woman I was any different from my brothers. I had a mother who was inherently a feminist, she never used the word but was inherently a feminist. I had very active years in social work during the course and we had very active demands made on us. So I found it very hard, I

still find it hard, to adjust to the new type of training, though I went back and did my Master's degree later. So, okay I did personnel work, I was in England, so how did I come into 'real' social work?

Rosie

How did you become involved in social work? What was your first involvement in real social work?

Frances

When I was in England, Ruth Hoban wrote over to me and said they needed somebody in South Melbourne. Now South Melbourne was her pet, she had set it up. I was thinking of coming back, so I applied, and from England I got the job at South Melbourne, and I was there for five years. That was my first experience of what was technically a social work job. I say 'technically', because I began to see myself as a social worker, but only as a social worker who had to be very generic and who had to see administration and management as a vital part of the job. That was where I got particularly interested in the 'managing', because at that stage it was quite innovative. I had another social worker who did the individual work, emphasised individual work, and we were a department, I wasn't a social worker in anyone else's department, I had my own department: I "managed" all the social services of South Melbourne.

Rosie

Like the Human Services?

Frances

I was a Human Services Manager, they didn't use the word then. It gets me when the role was suddenly discovered twenty years later. This, by the way, is my problem. I'll tell one anecdote here, why I don't go to conferences.

About ten years ago I went to a conference, and I sat there and everyone was rediscovering everything and I just thought, "This is ridiculous". I was getting madder and madder. I was walking away and one of my ex-students, because I had come into academia by then, saw me and she would have been all of 28 -30. She said, "Well, hello", and I didn't quite remember her and she said, "Oh" she said "I'm not going to any more conferences, these young ones just coming out, I'm getting this terrible feeling of *deja vue*", and then she looked at me and said, "What must it be like for you!" and I said, "You're dead right". I never went to another conference, I couldn't stand it. So this will be the first that I've actually attended. I've talked at conferences, and I've just managed to come in and talk and go away again and had some excuse. I just could not stay, and this illustrates when we talk later on about the frustrations when I think of the generic course we had in the forties and that job I had in the fifties, and then people were discovering generic social work, particularly in England. I went back to England two or three times. Thirty or forty years later it is very depressing.

Rosie

And England has very strong local government doesn't it? Compared with here?

Frances

Well, you can't call it local government, because it's more equivalent to State. They divide into Boroughs. When you say it's strong there is no equivalent whatsoever. Their so-called local government runs education. It's really equivalent to our State. Then it went through a process of putting everything together again, after it split. I have friends still working over there. An ex-staff member from P.I.T., whom I go and see, is in local government over there. He was writing saying, "Guess what, we put everything together with Thatcherism and you know merged everything" and he said, "Guess what we are doing now, splitting it all up again, ten years later". This constant cycle, Case Mix discovered in America ten years ago. I can remember sitting at Melbourne University in a staff seminar, when I was there. I am now an Associate and I go sometimes, and I was saying, "Look, Case Mix is going to come here, you've got to decide how you feel about it. You've got to look at what's happening in America and what are the consequences involved." Nobody took any notice of me and now we are talking pros and cons of Case Mix, fifteen years after it was introduced in America.

Rosie

When will people ever learn?

Frances

That's my biggest frustration in answering that question right through.

So when I was at South Melbourne I thought, well it looks as if I'm becoming identified with social work, but a certain sort of social work. So I thought perhaps I'd better see a little bit more of what's happening, and also update my theory of the more social work aspect, so I did. There were the two reasons I wanted to do a Masters, and nobody knew what to do with me in my Masters, because I had this Diploma. I had the Diploma, and an Arts Degree, but we did no Honours in those days, and nobody knew if I should do an M.A. prelim or what I should do. I think I was about the first Masters and it was an M.A., a Masters by research in the early fifties.

Rosie

Master of Arts? At Melbourne University? B.A. then at Melbourne University?

Frances

Yes, Master of Arts. M.A. and B.A. at Melbourne University.

My M.A. was in social work, it was before they had an M.S.W. and it was an M.A. Research, but it was social work.

Rosie

And what was the area of your research?

Frances

Red Cross.

Rosie

Of the actual agency, or?

Frances

It was an administration one.

Rosie

Red Cross Administration?

Frances

Yes, because I had been Director of Social Work at Red Cross.

They decided that they didn't know what to do with me when I said I wanted to do a Masters, because they had just introduced that you could do a Masters in Social Work, but nobody had worked details out. So, they said, "Right, you haven't got an Honours, we haven't got a Preliminary going yet. You need to do the third year, and I didn't mind doing the third year again, working full time, just to see what was happening in social work theory. So I did the third year, but I didn't have to do the fieldwork because I was supervising students and they did feel it would look a little bit funny if I did some fieldwork somewhere. So I did the third year and got the required Honours. I had also by that stage published a few things, like that chapter in the book 'Growing Old'. I had published an article in a journal on Municipal Social Work or something. So they took those publications and I managed Honours in the final year and so they gave me a Prelim. So then all I had to do was the Thesis.

I left the Thesis at that time, and then I did it later when I was with Red Cross. So actually I got my Masters. I was the first person to start one in that fifties period, but I actually didn't present my Thesis until the sixties.

Rosie

Would you still have a copy of that article on Municipal Social Work, because that would be very interesting in relation to what we are doing on the oral history?

Frances

Well, it's so old, way in the fifties.

Rosie

But it would be very interesting.

Frances

I don't know where it is. I haven't kept it. I might. I'll put a note.

It's quoted. I was asked to examine a Masters Thesis from NSW which was something to do with Local Government. I have forgotten whose it was. And I noticed they had used my one and only article, very early article in the social work journal, which in those days was called FORUM.

Rosie

I could probably find it.

Frances

You'll probably find it. It would have been in the fifties. It was one of my first articles so I never particularly recommended it to anyone.

Rosie

I'm sure it would be excellent.

Frances

And I wrote a section in "Growing Old", and it was on municipal social work. That was published by Cheshires but you can't get a copy of that anywhere, and guess what, I haven't one.

I now keep things that I write, but in those early days, I lent it to someone and never got it back. It was in a book called "Growing Old", edited by Stoller, and I wrote about municipal social work.

Rosie

And you couldn't get a copy of that one again?

Frances

I doubt it. People have asked me, I lent mine unfortunately.

Rosie

It wouldn't be in the Baillieu Library at Melbourne University?

Frances

I wouldn't think so, but you could try. Edited by Stoller, it's called "Growing Old" and it's published by Cheshires, and it would have been in the fifties.

Rosie

So going back to your areas of practice. You've talked a bit about your involvement in municipal social work at South Melbourne and then you touch on the Red Cross. What else would you like to say about areas of practice?

Frances

Well, I can go chronologically.

I left South Melbourne and I went to New Guinea to do community work. It was at the time when there had been a Foote Inquiry (by a man called Foote) into the role of women in New Guinea, because they were coming towards independence and they felt that the women had been left very much behind. Not unexpectedly with an Australian-administered mandate. They wanted to look at this and to work with the women, to try and get them "ready" for the independence period. So I went there and

physically it was not very good for me because I've got this white skin, white hair. I've had white hair all my life, sometimes I've dyed it and sometimes I haven't. But it was a fascinating exercise, I was running group programs for 'potential women leaders' and helpers, I suppose it was mainly training, but it was training of everything from potential women indigenous people, through to the volunteers who were also finding it very hard to get used to the changing role of the European in New Guinea.

I had group sessions with everyone from Lady Cleland down to the little Salvation Army lady who helped, and so on. So that was an interesting experience. So I did that for the required time. Then I came back.

Rosie

What made you change from that or what made you come back?

Frances

Healthwise I would never have stayed there, I couldn't have. They were a little reluctant for me to go, only that I guaranteed that I would wear Radium Institute cream every time I went out. As we were literally going out, it wasn't as if I was sitting in an office. I dine out telling some of my experiences, it was quite difficult. There was no way I would stay there. I don't think psychologically I would have stayed there either, I found some interesting problems. I couldn't learn Pidgin, I psychologically couldn't learn Pidgin. So that was the time there were a number of social workers around. Joy Noble, who has written a number of books on volunteerism, she was there at the time too, a South Australian.

I specifically tried to develop a generic approach. I know another placement I had when I was in my course, was a Port Melbourne youth club. Everyone had to do a group work one, a youth worker, a community one, individual, and the only way you could do that was if you had about eight or nine placements. That was the first attempt at a generic course. There was never a P.S.W. course - the personnel one. They had to be made to do the Personnel course. Interestingly some years later, there were a few odd people around who did it, but practically nobody did after all the men left. I suggested they should drop it when I came back into the staff at Melbourne, as it still existed. It was as hard to get a course dropped then as it is to get one started now. I was put on a subcommittee with the Head of the School of Business, Melbourne University, myself, and the Personnel Superintendent of Australian Paper Manufacturers, to look at it. We finally persuaded the University to drop it and some other department to take it up. I said it was not suitable in social work. It wasn't. It is done elsewhere, by the way. India does all its personnel training in social work, so there are some interesting things around. I could go on forever, because I have been very interested in this. But it was not suitable for the way social work was going here. That's why nobody would do it. They had two students one year and one the next and three the next, and it was wasting all this time and money. Gail Morgan did the personnel course and then transferred across and changed to social work. She is around in the social work field. And there were an odd one or two that went into social work rather than personnel.

Rosie

So you were at the Red Cross?

Frances

I was Director of Social Work Service for five years or so. That's when I did my Masters Thesis, which I did on Red Cross, but on some organisational aspects. I actually did it more or less with social work and politics, and that's where I became connected to the Politics Department, and the Public Administration part of it particularly. In fact Leon Peros who was Reader in Public Admin and Alan Davies who was Professor, became very much colleagues of mine. I gave a few lectures in Public Admin, the thesis spanned those, and in fact they offered to publish it. In fact PIT Press published it but I had an Introduction from Leon Peros in it when I published it. It was called 'Voluntary Organisations: A Case Study'. I did my Masters Thesis, as I say, while I was full time working and I wrote the thesis. I completed the thesis and then that's when I became an academic. It got First Class Honours, so I thought, "Oh well, I think I'll look at being an academic".

Rosie

At Melbourne University?

Frances

No, I went to the University of Western Australia first. I was there when they started up their course, I'm always interested in beginnings. Then I came to Melbourne. I was at Melbourne and then Phillip Institute of Technology was opening up and I opened up the course at P.I.T.

Rosie

When would you have come into Melbourne University?

Frances

From memory I would say about 1969 – '70, '71 about that time. Then I went to P.I.T and I started the social work course there in 1972. I left the social work course in 1980 and I was Assistant Director for my last year at the Institute. It was an acting role because the Institute was working towards merging and I had said I was going to leave, for all sorts of reasons. But I did the role for the last year, I wasn't filling in for anyone, if you know what I mean. I said, "Well, I'll only do it if I function as an Assistant Director". It was a particularly interesting year because that was the year we were working out the merger, and as the Assistant Director, the internal organisation was mine, the Director was concentrating on the merger to some extent and external things. So I more or less had the administration of the Institute and also I had to do the personnel side and we were trying to merge the terms and conditions of two very different organisations. Fascinating, but literally an incredible exercise because we were meeting sometimes until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, and then I used to get to work at 7:30 and I would be starting work again at 7:30. I stayed on for three months after the merger took place while the Director had three months leave to recover. And I "initiated" the new Director. The previous Director became the Assistant Director of the new merged organisation. The

new Director was from outside, and I had three months with him and then I left in April/May 1982 and I set up my own consultancy services business. And I've done lots of consultancies since.

Rosie

And what is your consultancy about?

Frances

Management.

Rosie

Of human services?

Frances

Yes.

I've continued to be interested in management generally. I was a member of the Institute of Personnel Management in its early days and then it changed to the A. H.R.I, Australian Human Resources Institute and they made me a Life Member a few years ago. So I get all their material and everything. I continue to read in the two areas, which I find is one of the big gaps in social work. They go into management jobs but they don't know how to read, think, understand management literature and they can't bridge that gap. I still have quite a link with the Human Resource Management area.

Rosie

Can we go on and talk about your satisfactions and frustrations in your role as a social worker?

Frances

Well if you mean as social work administrator or as a social work academic, I've got different sets of frustrations with the two lots.

Rosie

We are interested in both, because that's what we would see as your social work role.

Frances

Well, I'm going to be provocative here, I say I don't know what a social work role is, and that's my biggest criticism, I'll come to that later perhaps.

Rosie

Well, we are talking about what for you was your social work role, in a sense.

Frances

Well, I don't know when I was a social worker and when I was not, and that comes to the whole question of identity of social work. I have always been a manager, administrator. I have "done" other

work, because I got people telling me I didn't know what it was like, and when I was at Red Cross I used to do all the Intake on Friday afternoons. That was the time nobody ever wanted to do intake, for all sorts of reasons, and you as a social worker would know, you get all the problems that people rush in with on a Friday afternoon. So in order to understand what was happening and also because I wanted to do that, I took all the Intake on Friday afternoons. I would carry who ever I took just for a short period of time and I found that was interesting diagnostically, and also it enabled me to decide to whom I would refer it.

By the way, Red Cross at that stage had a staff of about twenty. We had regional workers, Faye Marles was one of my regional workers down in Geelong, she is Deputy Chancellor at Melbourne University now. I had about 70 volunteer welfare officers scattered around the state, whom we got in for conferences. I employed and trained the first welfare officers in this state, and did most of the training program for them. There were lots of recriminations, lots of feelings

about welfare officers and social workers, I could go on about that for many hours. I developed what I saw as a role and how to use it, and we had welfare officers. We ran a live-in housekeeping service for clients with psychiatric problems. We had Keith Benn coming in and giving lectures on that issue. We had an immense training set up, we did some group work, we did some individual work. We did quite a lot of research, which I saw as a vital part. At one stage or other the staff said that when a client came in they decided, "Do they belong to the Deserted Father's group, are they having a Housing problem?" because we were also doing a study on housing. We were one of the group that took part in the Sixty Families Project, you know. We were doing research, because, again, that's my concept of social work.

I took eight students from Melbourne University and gave them group placements. Then we did group supervision, though they also had an individual supervisor to some extent. They didn't do any individual work, which frightened the daylight out of some people at the University. We had two groups of four, doing non-individual social work. I don't use the word 'Casework' by the way. I never have, I say it's social work, at least I tried, I lost the battle. I used to say, "It's social work, and you may be working with individuals or groups or communities and so on. But what's casework?" An extra problem is the fact that the business field had taken over the word 'case management', that was years ago. Now I'm smiling, I suppose, at the word.

Rosie

Yes, it's being re-run at the moment.

Frances

Yes. And that was in the sixties.

Rosie

And you were just interestingly commenting before about doing your intake on a Friday afternoon, that had become very fashionable in the '90's – '80's too. Being at the front desk like the rent-a-car man.

Frances

Yes, that's right. The students, by the way, all had to do some reception in this placement that I gave them. And I find this awful *deja vue*.

Rosie

So the satisfaction came from the, the what?

Frances

The satisfaction came from doing this, doing all these exciting "innovative" things. I used to do other things. Don't forget I was also doing my Masters Thesis at this time. I was trying to get people to read, so what I did is I agreed to set up a network. I got a group of people, e.g. Len Tiemey did one area, Marj Awburn did the Hospitals, to review all these particular areas. And they did a little review for me, and I published that and set up an index. I said, "I'll do it for six months", and this illustrates both the satisfactions and frustrations, by the way. I said, "I'll do it for six months. I'll get people together, but I won't do all the reviews." I did the management ones, then I put these together and it was circulated with the AASW newsletter. I said, "I'll do it for this time". I did card indexes so I had an index of all this literature. My staff were all expected to read, every staff meeting I would talk about something and to hold their own they gradually started to read. At the end of the year I couldn't get anyone also to carry it on even for one year each. Now if only we had all done it for one year. So there was my satisfaction in doing it, but my frustration was that nobody else would do these things. I say I was doing my Masters Thesis to illustrate the fact that I was as busy as anyone, also running the agency. People would say to me, 'I haven't got time to read'.

My other reason for seeing how things are going, is that I have done locums. So in between going to New Guinea, when I came back from New Guinea, between going overseas (because I've been overseas two or three times), when I came back from overseas, when I came back from Western Australia, I've done locums. I worked out that I have worked for three years in Hospitals, adding it up. I was asked to do a locum at Princess Margaret. I started doing a Ph.D in WA, my father had a stroke and I had to come back here. That's when the Ph.D. was half way through, I tried to go back and finish it off and I more or less did, but it's a long story there. My subject was the Welfare System in WA. When I went back in one of my periods to try and do a bit more on the thesis, Princess Margaret Hospital there said, "Could you do a locum? The senior is going away." So I stayed on, I didn't have anything that was back in Melbourne at that time. And I stayed on for four months. What I didn't realise was that, because I was locuming for the senior, they ended up putting me in the senior's position. Now that is extremely difficult, to come in and be the senior, in a locum situation. Although I knew the Hospital, because we used it as field work, and also I was quite interested in it for various reasons, Princes Margaret the children's hospital, that's where I became interested in Child Protection by the way, and the Senior did the child protection. So I was thrown into a child protection role. This by the way is relevant, because I did a review of the Children's Protection Society later. So I did that locum and I did four times at St. Vincent's. In fact we had a bet that I'd be back, a hundred dollar bet at the last time, because I'd come back there in between, when Marj Awburn was there, I knew her

because we were the same vintage more or less. I would just go in and work in the psychiatric clinic, the medical in-patients. In the end I have done a lot of individual work.

When I was head at P.I.T. I decided I was a bit tired of people telling me as an academic I didn't know what was really happening, so I took a year off, a year without pay. I spent six months with the Social Welfare Department, as it was called then, and six months looking at Social Responsibility in Industry, which was relevant to something else I published later. The six months I did in the Social Welfare Department again was interesting, because I said that I wanted to work as a base grade worker. David Green, who was in charge of the regions at the time and whom I knew of course, had said, "Well, go around and ask the five metropolitan regions", because I didn't want to travel. Three of them said yes they would take me. In the other two of them the senior person had been a student of mine so they weren't keen to take me. I spent a period of three months or so at Preston (North East), that didn't work really. I'm not sure whether that was my fault or the staff's fault, I'm inclined to say that it was equal because the staff would not let me be a base grade worker, they would come and ask me things. Also I found myself biting my tongue, I'd talk about something I'd read, and they would say, "Of course we haven't got any time to read and practice". And that is anathema to me. I would find myself, even if I said nothing, looking, and it didn't work. Somebody said, "Oh, you can't function as a base grade". Actually I functioned quite satisfactorily as a base grade in England where nobody knew me, but I couldn't here, I realised that. However I did have those three months on an ordinary duty roster and functioning as a base grade worker. Then I said to David, "It isn't working". So I went in and did a couple of studies for David, one into Community Health Centres and another one into Supportive Grants.

Then while I was doing consultancy work I got a phone call about five or six years ago from Community Services, from Kate Redwood, who said " We're desperate, Our senior social worker, and our officer in charge of St Kilda is going on leave for three or four months and we can't get anyone to take it on". The deputy there wouldn't and no one in the department would go there. She said, "Will you?" Now I was in between, I had just finished one consultancy and I was going to do another one at Doncaster with Alun Jackson, and I had this three or four months. I was going to have a rest, but I didn't. I did four months there. That was a really interesting experience.

Rosie

That was like mid '80's, was it?

Frances

When would have that been, would have been 1987, no later than that. I tell you I was 64 at the time, because they suddenly woke up I might be too old, but I was 64, so it would be '87.

I had to get down to St. Kilda from here, and I had to suddenly walk in and have case reviews, you know how legally they can be difficult. I had to read up the Act in a great hurry, talk about being thrown in. I mean I'm used to it because that's why I was telling this story, I'm always doing that. When you do consultancy you get very used to picking up a place pretty quickly. But all the same, that

was the hardest job I have ever done in my life. However, that did decide me, I wanted to write a book about managing community services organisations, and that was the genesis for the major book that I have written.

Rosie

And what's that?

Frances

I will show it to you. [Shows the book.]

Rosie

We will just go back to satisfactions. You have talked quite a bit about the satisfactions, but if you wanted to sort of sum up for you a bit about, say the satisfactions of individual work or community work or social work in general?

Frances

I would not. I don't get satisfactions out of long term individual work, I recognise that.

I like diagnostic work, and I think there is very very poor diagnostic work around. I spent a lot of time, because of the work I did at Red Cross, doing the duty scene, on diagnostic work and I won't go into it now, both theoretically and practically. When I was at South Melbourne I was interested in the diagnostic stage of individual work. That is the only stage that I really spent any time on and which I'm interested in.

But I've done all the other areas, I mean the group work, the community work, the management, the administration, all those other areas of social work. Now if, as is happening I think, there is some identification of social work with individualised specialised work, that to me has no interest what so ever.

Now from the point of view of frustrations, well, I think I've already spoken of some of those. The major frustration is the lack of thinking, the lack of reading, the lack of knowledge, in the profession. By that I mean people, I'll talk about the Conference. It seems to me that what's happened is that people are interested in some specialised practice area that makes them, they think, do a better job, makes them feel more secure. And they will read and talk in that area, but it's so specialised. There are oncological social workers there, and they will read all the oncological material, but not analysing roles, identities, looking at that particular service in its organisational context and then in its community context. Now I did try one stage at Melbourne University when I was teaching there, I said, "Let's take these case examples that we do". I was the coordinator of the final year, social work. I said, "Let's take these case illustrations and look at them totally". There was a case called "Gabrielle", I will never forget it, it was an adoption case that had gone wrong. I said, "Don't let us just look at the interpersonal relations, let's look at what is the matter with the Adoption Act. Let's look at what's the matter with the follow up, what's the matter with the organisation, what effect it has. Let's look at the

social attitudes to adoption that had influenced the mother. Let's look at the total situation." I found not only did students find this extremely difficult to do, but so did staff. You had your staff member who could only look at the interpersonal relations between that mother and child, adoptive mother and child. Also what happened is, if you tried to look at that particular situation as a total, you couldn't just do it in one session. You would have one session on Gabrielle, and the next session on another one. I said, "We really have to spend three sessions on this, taking it as a total". Nobody wanted to do that, they thought that was boring, that they should have more than one session on a particular case. They wanted to get on to the next one.

Then when I went to set up the Phillip Institute school, I thought, "Aha, I've got four years, I can at last develop." One of the reasons I left Melbourne was that it was going from the three year to the two, and I thought, you'll never teach generic social work in only two years, no way. We were so proud of being the first generic course in Melbourne, when for example in England they were still having probation courses, and they didn't have a B.S.W. They still had P.S.W., and M.S.W. courses and we had none of them. We had generic social work that was going to save the world. It just never succeeded, and it couldn't succeed unless people were prepared to spend miles more time.

The other thing I found when I, again I had a fair chance of setting up a four year generic course at Philip, was that it failed, because I couldn't get staff who taught and who thought that way, not really. I had a terrific core, we tried all sorts of things. We used to have Jim Crawley, who taught the individual work, and myself who taught the community work. We did workshops together. He and I went and did a workshop in Sydney. Another couple were Peter Brennan and Viv McCutcheon. Peter Brennan, who was an individual therapist and Viv McCutcheon, who is now Commissioner for Health and so on. She was in the Community side. So those two taught together. We taught together, deliberately in front of classes, so that we could try and get the generic concept across. But some staff found it such an effort, and the whole of their training was not that way. I more or less gave up the struggle in the end. There is no generic course left anywhere that I know. So I have this ultimate frustration. Maybe it was an impossible dream. It certainly is impossible now, and I don't think it will ever come back. I don't think the re-integration will come back.

Rosie

There are lots of generic jobs out there, I can tell you that.

Frances

That is the point, you see. I said to people, "Look, out there they've got to be generic." But we were not training generically, and educating generically. I have this sadness that that goal dream that I had, the whole reason I went to Philip (and I was there for nine years in the social work course, then the one year in the Assistant Director's role), didn't take place. Because, I know it's needed in practice. I mean I've done enough practice, that's why I kept on going back to do practice, to prove that out there the person who could think generically could do a better job, in my opinion. There were a few of them around. And as you say, people have been thrust into functioning with groups, they were being thrust into understanding the community, they were being thrust into being management and they were

making a bad job of it. By the way, I did a paper at a conference that was published in a book called "Social Work in Australia", on ten years of social administration. We were told to sum up a decade and I did 'A Decade of Social Administration', that's what it was called. And the final words in it are the final words in our book. I have quoted myself, and they are something to the effect. Do you have the book there?

Rosie

Frances, you have talked to me about a very central frustration in relation to not being able to implement the generic training course, and that's a very big frustration for you. Are there other satisfactions or frustrations that you would like to talk about, or would you like to go on and talk about your involvement in the A.A.S.W.?

Frances

I think I want to stick with the big ones because if one picks out all the little ones it is too specific. Related to that is my frustration with the specificity of everything, in the conferences, it's always the little issue that concerns, my little area of practice. Now, I believe there are reasons for this. I think that people have retreated into what the human resource management people call the 'comfort zone'.

Now my involvement and role in the A.A.S.W. That was very extensive for many, many years so I can't give account of all the details. Right back at the beginning of course, we were all such a small group. We all knew one another. The A.A.S.W. was our networking, if you like. You all went to the meetings and if anyone wasn't there, well somebody would say, "Oh, somebody isn't at the meeting." We would meet in ANZAC House and we would all go and have supper afterwards in the restaurant that was over the road in those days. It was a very small closely-knit group, everyone knew everyone. I can almost put the time when I first went into an A.A.S.W. meeting and suddenly realised I didn't know most of the people there. I was very involved in those early days. I was on everything, I was on committees that did this and that, I was Convenor of the Social Action Committee, I was a member of the Accreditation Committee that did all the overseas accreditations, I've forgotten what it was called then. We were very active, all the time.

The biggest A.A.S.W. issue was one, and I can't place the year, when it was decided to cease being a union. The early A.A.S.W. was the union, as well as the professional association. People who had fought very hard to get us accredited as the union were very angry when the move came to cease to be a union. That's a long story. I can remember meetings all over the place and acrimony and really very strong feelings. So what was set up eventually were two groups, the A.A.S.W. retained its name but ceased to be registered with the arbitration authorities and ceased to be the union, and the A.S.W.U., the Australian Social Welfare Union, was set up. Now the significant thing about that is, that most people seem to have forgotten, that it was not only a welfare union, it was to be the union for the whole of the welfare industry and it was to be the union for social workers as well as welfare officers. The A.A.S.W. was to be this professional body which was to concentrate on accreditation, education, ethics, professional issues, and industrial issues concerning social workers or welfare workers or anyone else was to be the A.S.W.U. In fact Glad Hawkins was the secretary of both and they shared

offices. Later on people talked as if the A.S.W.U. was for welfare personnel, it wasn't, it was the union. When the A.S.W.U. hived off, the A.A.S.W. paid and helped. The A.A.S.W. helped the A.S.W.U. to be set up, on the grounds that it would then take over the industrial side, and to some extent the social action side. Then later on you get gradual change in the union seen as 'welfare' and even seen as anti the A.A.S.W. in some cases, and all sorts of things developed. So I had a lot to do with that in those days. I was also very active in the drafting of the M.E.R. (Minimum Educational Requirements) two or three times; there was a group of us. I had a lot to do with that, a lot to do with accreditation and overseas courses. I was Vice President for Education of our Branch. I was President of our Branch at one stage. So yes, very active.

Rosie

What was your first involvement in the A.A.S.W? When did you first become involved?

Frances

As soon as we set up an A.A.S.W. Right at the beginning. I haven't been active, I suppose for the last ten years. I'm a Life Member now of course, so I have on the whole gone to the annual dinners, but I haven't even done that for the last two or three years.

Rosie

So you've been a member since the Association started?

Frances

The Association is fifty years, which means '46. Now I started my course in '47, so whether I was a student member, I can't quite remember, but certainly I joined as soon as I qualified.

Rosie

And you are now a Life Member, and you have perhaps been less involved in the last ten years and haven't been to much in the last two?

Frances

Well I haven't been, certainly to a conference for about ten years for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

Rosie

What has it meant to you to be involved in the A.A.S.W.?

Frances

Well, in the early days it meant everything, because to me, I just can't imagine anyone doing a job. When I was in the personnel field of course I was a member of the, as it was, the Institute of Personnel Management, then later on the A.H.R.I. and I'm a Life Member of that. I mean, if I'm going to do a professional job, it wouldn't occur to me not to be a member of my professional association.

And not to indulge in continuing education.

Rosie

And what have been the benefits for you?

Frances

Well, that. Networking, learning, satisfactions, a feeling one's doing something for one's profession. I mean, I find it hard to imagine people not belonging to their professional association. I found that I just don't understand. I found it particularly useful when I was chairperson, as we called it then, or chairman I think we might have even said in those days, of the Social Action Committee because we developed a quite active social action program and I was particularly interested in that. We drew up priorities, I developed networks of people who could be the spokesperson on particular areas. We had the O'Malley case. We had a big change in the Housing Commission patterns, and there were a lot of action areas, and I found, as you probably realise by now, I like organizing, I like planning, I like analyzing, and I felt that I really enjoyed that.

Rosie

So with that adoption case gone wrong that you mentioned before, of there being something that needed to be done in the area of adoption legislation you might have taken it on too.

Frances

That's right.

To me, to stop just there, now I didn't mean everyone should do everything, but they should feed in.

Rosie

There should be a process?

Frances

That's right.

Rosie

And you wanted to be very involved in that process?

Frances

Yes. It was in a sense like special interest groups, but for a different purpose. I developed networks of people who developed the contacts with the media in relation to issues etc. Over and over again, we would have somebody ringing up and asking the Association's opinion on issues, and they would ring the Brotherhood, which became the one they would ring up on some issues. Nobody was ringing the A.A.S.W., because they would ring them up and then people would go into a flap. They wouldn't want to make comments, and they wouldn't want to be interviewed, and then they would say, "Well, I can't speak for the whole."

Rosie

I wondered, Frances, if you had any views on the future role of the Association?

Frances

Don't forget that I haven't really had much contact with the Association for a while, and so I'm hesitant to say what is its future role. I think you have to have one. I think it's absolutely essential. I don't think it's enough to have a group of social workers in a particular area meeting together, that's my criticism, it should be broader than that. I can remember the long discussions we had on what are the priorities, and I simply don't know the present situation. I haven't read enough about the recent Association. I haven't tried enough to work out whether the priorities are educational or social action or changing the environment or what should be the main one.

This is the argument that goes all through the union movements, you know, should the unions look after the welfare of their people, rather than taking on the Greens and green issues and so on and so forth. This has been a big issue and quite recently the unions have been tending to say they want to come back to being concerned with the welfare of their own members. So its the same issues facing the A.A.S.W. Should its main role be educating, looking after the needs of their own members, or should they be looking at social issues and so on. It was the big one when it split and the general idea was that the A.S.W.U. was going to look after social action and the issues, but that didn't happen, and then you've got people complaining that the A.A.S.W. isn't been used. I have read the material that I've been getting, and I notice that they are setting up policy statements on social issues coming from the headquarters. Again it depends what you mean, the different roles of the national people and the state branches. Should they have different roles? Or should they be duplicating at a different level, or what.

Then there is the educational issue. I have read that recent material about social work courses and accreditation and I think that it's good that they are taking a continuing education role, because I think that should be a major role of the A.A.S.W. It's very interesting that the A.H.R.I. (Australian Human Resources Institute), which I belong to, actually now runs courses itself and runs them in conjunction with Deakin and people get Masters Degrees. The A.H.R.I is a very big and powerful organisation actually. I find it very interesting looking at the two organisations that I am a life member of. I used to go to the meetings of both of them years ago. On the Monday night I would go to the I.P.M.A., as it was then, 90 per cent male in those days, and then on Thursday I would go to the A.A.S.W., 90 per cent or 95 per cent female. I wasn't quite sure whether the extraordinary differences between those two was the gender issue or the difference of the two professions. They would have great arguments in the A.H.R.I., it was I.P.M.A. then, and one man would say, 'What a lot of bloody rot, Joe' and they would argue it out and everything. Then I would go to the A.A.S.W., and I would hear somebody say, 'I quite understand what your point of view is, but don't you think you etc.' The stylistic difference was just so extraordinary.

Rosie

I think we should move on to major issues and changes. What major issues and debates have been

significant during your professional life?

Frances

Well, I think I have covered those. The education, the generic education, the specificity issue, the identity of social work, the social work role in management, that quote I gave from the book in 1976 and again in 1991. They are still there.

Rosie

What about significant changes during your professional life?

Frances

Well, I think they are covered again.

Rosie

Well, you were talking about many more social workers going from a profession that was a few people to...

Frances

That's right. The size changed, the role changed, the climate changed for social workers. Oh, perhaps I should mention one of the other big changes is of course the identity issue. I was involved in the accreditation of courses. I was on the accrediting committee of the V.I.C., Victorian Institute of Colleges, at one stage, and I had to go around accrediting all sorts of courses, as well as social work. What struck me is that course after course, take the heading off and they would be social work. The Community Health courses, some of the Welfare courses, Sociology, Applied Sociology, course after course. One particular course, it even used the language, but what was happening. Take the community health nurses course, I had a lot to do with that at one stage, because that was one of the first nursing courses in the college system at Phillip. I was on the planning for that course at one stage and it read like a social work course. What was happening is that the technical area of the nurses, or the O.T.'s, or the Physios, was different, but all the rest read like a social work course, except that it didn't spend as much time on it.

You would get a group work course and they would then go out and do 'group work', but they would have had only twelve two-hour sessions. And that worried me, it worried me educationally. You have all these people and their job descriptions, their course descriptions, are all very similar to social work. So what is left to social work, I kept on being asked, where is social work's core? O.T. have this core, the O.T.s and the Physios, sometimes you can't tell what they are doing that's different, or the community health nurses. But they all have their own little core of identified expertise. There is a book by Nokes, 'Professional Task in Welfare Practice'. He classifies welfare, by the way things like psychiatry and teaching are included, he uses 'welfare' in a very broad sense. And he says that unless you can find a visible core, you're in trouble. The two professions that are in the greatest trouble were teachers and social workers. But teachers are finding their visible core in technology, and then he said, "Where is the visible core of social work?" That is one of the biggest issues that one

faces.

Rosie

Yes, I've struggled with that one myself.

Frances

Well, look at what's happening, and it's happened in practice. The jobs are advertised, as somebody with a Social Work qualification or Social Science or something related. So where is and how is the A.A.S.W. (and this doesn't help us). [Refers to the Conference program.] These are all just little areas of practice.

Rosie

You are showing me the program for the A.A.S.W. (Victorian Branch) Conference coming up on the 25th September, and all the different specialties on the back.

Frances

Yes and it's all specialties, except for the one session that I may go to. "The challenge for social workers in senior and management positions in today's changing environment." That's the only one that really is looking at a broad spectrum of a social work challenge and role, the others are, 'Where to after parenting courses? Research in child and family services'. And in the special interest description you've not only got mental health but you've got child mental health. You know, right down to oncological social work practically. I have nothing against that, but where is the cohesion and coming together, where's the identity? Where is the visible core? And what about welfare courses?

Rosie

Section five of our area is the question about comments on your particular area of expertise within social work. Is there any more that you wanted to add about that, or did you want to sum that up for me?

Frances

Well, I have my problems with identifying myself as a social worker of course. I would have always seen myself as a social worker but I just don't know which bit of social work I can identify myself with. My particular area of expertise is in the administration and management of areas that concern social work, the human services if you like. But if you look at the average social work course conference that's not even there. People seem to regard it as something that is just on the periphery and you somehow do it when you get there. So how can I talk about my particular contribution? I have no negative feelings about my contribution, I enjoy it, I love it, I write about it and I am conceited enough to believe that it's important, this particular area. But I don't think social work has come to terms with it.

Rosie

So can we add your social action and your education and your consultancy. Can we add those as

well, areas of expertise?

Frances

Yes, and management, they are my areas, yes. But again, there is a group called H.E.R.D.S.A (Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia). I went to a number of H.E.R.D.S.A. conferences, there were no social workers there. There were Psychologists, there were nurses, there was every other profession that you could think of. Education, it was higher education, there were educators from every other profession, and I went to a conference and there wasn't one other social work educator there. We don't think out from ourselves.

Rosie

Though I think sometimes we think we do.

Frances

Well, tell me. As I said, I haven't had much contact with the profession as a profession for ten years.

Rosie

I think we sometimes think we do, that's the impression that I get, but I have no difficulty with what you are saying.

Frances

Yes, I don't know. When I say for ten years I have been to some Human Resource things and they are very relevant to social work and there is no sign of any cross reading of Human Resource Management literature, which is after all very relevant to social work. I have lots of friends who are social workers, so when I say I haven't had any contact with social work let me qualify by saying that I have a group of contacts. Alun Jackson, my co-author, Val and Paul Conboy who trained at Melbourne University, Melanie Sheldon who trained at P.I.T., Sylvia Cozier who trained at WA. There is a group of about eight to ten of my ex-students that are now all my friends. It's great and I see them a lot, and they use me as an informal mentor. I also have three others who are using me as a formal mentor, in other words on a financial professional basis. They tell me what's happening, they are using me to help them with managerial issues. So I do know, in a sense, what's happening, but only in a very limited sense. I don't know what the A.A.S.W. is doing or much about it. I do know what is happening to some extent out there still. That's why I call myself semi-retired.

Rosie

So you are starting to talk to me about your view on the future of social work and you're talking about more cross reading. You are saying that there is a lot out there that we are not drawing on.

Frances

And not only reading. Cross contact, as I said. I was talking about this conference. I don't know, maybe the A.A.S.W. is, but I don't see in the limited areas that I have, signs that the A.A.S.W. is interacting with a lot of other professional groups. Maybe it's so busy sorting itself out, I don't know.

There was an attempt, for example, a few years ago that I had something to do with. I'm just trying to remember when, date it. I have a danger of saying a few years ago and find it's ten years ago or fifteen years. But a group of social workers were going to meet with a group of younger lawyers. It arose out of some issue, and I was peripherally involved in it. I don't know if anything ever happened. But that is the sort of thing that should be happening. I don't know, maybe it is and I haven't heard about it.

Rosie

So you would like to see more of that in the future of the profession. What other comments would you have on the future of the social work profession?

Frances

Well, I have my ups and downs. I have times when I think that we haven't got one. We have become too diffuse, specialised and diffusive, you know what I mean. Split, disintegrated, but I may be quite wrong in that one. Looking at education, I don't know now. Once it was quite clear what all the social workers were educating people for. But it's very diffuse now. Now I don't mind that courses are doing different things. In fact V.P.S.E.C. (Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission) had an inquiry a few years ago, when it was suggested there were too many social work courses. V.P.S.E.C.'s inquiry said there were too many but it didn't have the courage to say which ones should go. But it did say they should do different things. In other words, students should be given a choice of whether they wanted to concentrate on a four year undergraduate course and go to P.I.T. (or RMIT as it now is), or whether they should go to the universities. They said the three universities in particular should develop areas of expertise, which is all the thing now. They never did it. They never got together enough to do it.

This is my concern, that I don't see signs that we get together, the schools or the branches or whatever. Maybe they do and it's not visible. Now it's floating around again, that there are too many schools of social work. And that, I think, is very serious to the future of social work. You are asking me about the future. Unless that is solved, that issue of what we really are educating for. It doesn't matter if each one is different as long as the total holds together. It's a choice area. So if people are going to specialise they should visibly specialise, so that students have the choice, e.g. I'll go to this one if I really want to specialise in management, administration and so on. But it has to have some sort of generic base, I think, if we are going to have any identity at all. I think I'm now going against my own desire for generic. But I think what one can do is make it postgraduate. In other words what I aimed at out at P.I.T. was to have a generic four year Bachelor, then to have post-graduate work in five areas; research, management/administration, clinical, community work and group work. So people would do all of those and have this generic base and they could specialise when they wanted to develop a greater depth in a particular area. Now what's happened is we have got the specialty without the generic depth.

Rosie

Medicine somehow manages it, doesn't it? It strikes me that medicine seems to manage running a

generic course and then having specialty.

Frances

Well, if you want six or seven years.

Rosie

Post graduate. Yes, true.

Frances

That's what I said. We went to two years. Social work education went to two years. Now how can you educate in two years? I said with generic you might do it in five years, four and a year specialty. But once you said two years, well, you had to give up the generic idea. So we have got people thrown into work, and they are strengthening all their specificities to give themselves a comfort zone, knowledge and security, but the workforce isn't quite matching that, I think. I don't know, you know better than I do.

I have covered actually all the areas that I have put some notes on.

Rosie

You prepared very well thank you.

Thank you.