

Social Work

Focus

SPRING 2023 – VOLUME 8, ISSUE 2

ISSN 2209-0045 (PRINT) | ISSN 2209-0053 (ONLINE)

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SPECIAL EDITION

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WARNING: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER READERS ARE WARNED THAT
THIS EDITION MAY CONTAIN IMAGES OF A DECEASED PERSON. CAUTION IS ADVISED.



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of Social Workers



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2023

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Real Scenarios and Outcomes

LEADERSHIP

- ▶ Leadership and Workplace Opportunity
- ▶ National Excellence Awards

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



PROF LYNETTE JOUBERT

Professor of Social Work,
University of Melbourne



A/PROF ANTHONY SCHEMBRI AM

Chief Executive,
Northern Sydney Local Health District

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Social Work Focus

ISSN 2209-0045 (PRINT) | ISSN 2209-0053 (ONLINE)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover: Photo by Clare Seibel-Barnes on Austock

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NEXT EDITION

Contributions for the Summer 2023-24 issue will be accepted until 20 October.

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.

EDITOR: Ann Philpott

COPYEDITOR: Ann Philpott

DESIGNER: Linda Muir

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.

The Voice Referendum and Anti-racist Practice

A statement from the Board of the AASW

This is an important time for all social workers to be aware of the impact of the referendum and consider how each of us and the profession enact our ethical duties of anti-racist and culturally safe practice to support Indigenous peoples, communities and fellow social workers.

The Board of the AASW reaffirms its ongoing commitment to reconciliation and decolonisation. These commitments are consistent with our core values, including cultural safety, professional integrity, social justice, dignity and respect.

Indigenous people and communities have different views on the Voice referendum as do non-Indigenous people. It is important for social workers to understand that there are not simply two sides (Yes and No) in response to the Voice referendum.

Discussion about the Voice referendum is causing direct and indirect harm to Indigenous Peoples and communities. These discussions have led to an increase in bigoted and racist attitudes and behaviours.

In this article, we provide you with some tools and resources to support your practice and each other.

The [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) has provided helpful suggestions that seek to minimise harm in referendum conversations. These include practising cultural humility, centring Indigenous knowledges, voices and perspectives and avoiding deficit discourses.

In line with the advice provided by the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Research, we are sharing the practical

support that is available during this stressful period.

Firstly, educate yourself about the referendum to reduce the burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to provide this education. We encourage social workers to listen to Indigenous Peoples' and communities' voices and perspectives.

Secondly, provide support to your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander friends, family and colleagues. Here are some links for mental health, counselling, and social and emotional wellbeing, as well as staying safe when using social media:

- [13YARN](#) is a support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. Phone 13 92 76.
- [eSafety Commission First Nations](#) includes strategies for staying safe on social media.
- [Lifeline](#) is a confidential crisis support and suicide prevention service. Phone 13 11 14.
- [Headspace](#) includes specific resources for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Headspace has centres for face-to-face services, or you can



VITTORIO CINTIO

AASW National President



contact their online and telephone support service, eheadspace, or phone 1800 650 890.

- [Gayaa Dhuwi \(Proud Spirit\) Australia](#), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health, and Suicide Prevention, is a comprehensive resource from the developers of 13 YARN.
- [Beyond Blue](#) for information on how to take care of yourself and manage your mental health and wellbeing. Free services include being able to telephone a counsellor or chat online.
- For a map of [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations](#), or see [here](#) for a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health/medical services.

We call on social workers to heighten their awareness of culturally safe and social justice-informed practice with service users and colleagues who

may be triggered or traumatised. Recognising this and advocating to support service users and colleagues is one way to do this. Please make use of the continuing professional development offered by the AASW and the diverse training, knowledges and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and organisations in enhancing your culturally safe practice.

Thirdly, take responsibility for reporting racism. If you witness racism, you can report it using these links.

- <https://callitout.com.au/> Call it Out, The First Nations Racism Register
- <https://humanrights.gov.au/> The Australian Human Rights Commission
- <https://www.esafety.gov.au/> The eSafety Commissioner, for online incidents
- <https://www.acma.gov.au/> The Australian Communications and Media Authority (for incidents in the media)

- The police, if you think you or someone else may be in danger, or if you think the behaviour was a criminal offence
- Your state or territory-based anti-discrimination commission
- The [Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency \(AHPRA\)](#) or your local health complaints organisation if you have concerns about a health practitioner.

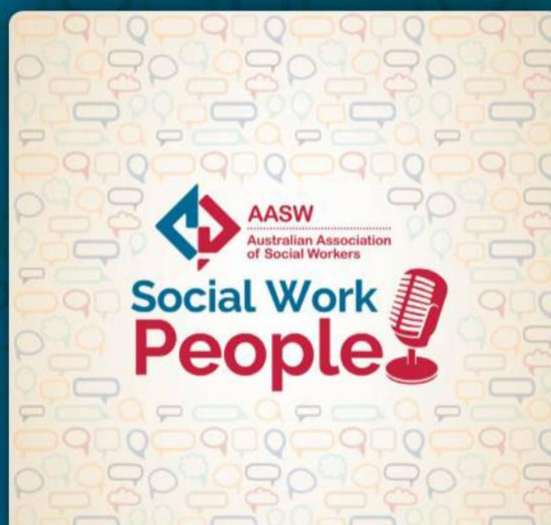
Thank you.

Vittorio Cintio

Vittorio Cintio

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

RAP Update

January to June 2023

Reconciliation Australia has approved our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for the period January 2023 to December 2024. The new RAP was released during NAIDOC week. Over the six months from January to June 2023, we are proud of the work achieved on our RAP deliverables.

We have:

- Reviewed our onboarding/induction processes to ensure staff are aware of our commitment to reconciliation
- Embedded cultural awareness training into our mandatory onboarding training including modules on racism, diversity and inclusion
- Consulted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to understand the complexities of the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- Reviewed our HR policies and procedures with a lens of cultural safety
- Implemented a Cultural Learning Strategy
- Incorporated recognition and respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledges and rights in our Code of Ethics, Practice Standards and ASWEAS, with a commitment to ensure each iteration is always culturally appropriate for the time
- Maintained an annual edition of *Social Work Focus* dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander topics and focus
- Increased representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in CPD offerings, including trainers, presenters and participants
- Continued to invite local Traditional Owners and Custodians to provide a Welcome to Country at significant events at state, national and international levels
- Continued to include an Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country at the commencement of internal and external meetings in accordance with our protocol
- Encouraged participation in national mentoring programs of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors and mentees
- Continued to provide four scholarships per annum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to attend our annual symposium or conference
- Continued to advertise job vacancies to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders
- Reviewed our HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace
- Developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Strategy
- Developed a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services
- Maintained an ongoing commercial relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, particularly in the area of CPD
- Increased the content of CPD curriculum and other online resources for members that focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific content
- Engaged more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators in the CPD curriculum and other online resources for members



CINDY SMITH

Chief Executive Officer

- Ensured ongoing budget allocations for RAP implementation
- Released a statement on The Voice to coincide with NAIDOC week
- Delivered a successful NAIDOC event featuring Professor Tom Calma.

Over the next six months, we will focus on:

- Continuing to establish, maintain and strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and partners
- Building relationships through celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Promoting reconciliation
- Increasing understanding of cultures through staff training and engagement
- Actively promoting and supporting opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and members
- Supporting members to grow in relation to understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Continuing our reconciliation journey.

Cindy Smith

Make National Registration of Social Work a Reality

What is next for social work registration?

The AASW continues to firmly advocate for the national registration of social workers. This long overdue reform would significantly improve the foundations of the profession in Australia. It is not just the AASW and social workers who believe this is necessary. There have also been three separate Coroners who have specifically recommended that social work should become a registered profession.

The social work profession should be included under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) administered by Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). The way this would happen is for a state- or territory-based health minister to sponsor a submission to the Health Ministers' Meeting (which is made up of the health ministers of each state and territory government, along with the Federal Minister for Health). Heads of Health Departments would assess the submission. It would require a process to assess the regulatory impacts of registration, including national consultation. When all health ministers agree, the *Health Practitioner National Law* would be amended to include social workers into the NRAS.

The AASW has been busy filling up Ministerial inboxes and meeting with Ministers to push for registration.

Where are we now?

An update on social worker registration in South Australia

The South Australian Parliament assented to the *Social Worker Registration Act 2021* in December 2021 to establish a South Australian Social Worker Registration Scheme. The passage of the Act enjoyed bipartisan support, and much credit is due to Tammy Franks (MLC, SA Greens) for her Private Members Bill to get the legislation over the finish line. The AASW, the South Australia Branch, AASW members and many others worked hard for years to make this happen.

This enormous achievement in the long campaign for social worker registration took place against a backdrop of inertia and unwillingness of state and federal ministers to implement a national scheme. South Australia "went it alone" and moved forward with its own state-based scheme—proving again to be national leaders paving the way.

The South Australian Government has committed \$4.7 million over four years to develop the Social Worker Registration Scheme and has appointed a Social Worker Registration Scheme Director with the complex task of implementing the scheme.

How did we get here?

Many factors converged to make South Australia the first state to move forward with social worker registration. One of the strong forces for change came about following tragic and potentially avoidable deaths in the South Australian Child Protection systems. Multiple coronial inquests, beginning with the inquest into the death of Chloe Valentine, demonstrated the high-risk environments of social work practice and the need to regulate the workforce to protect our most vulnerable.

Child protection is an especially complex and challenging field of social work, in much need of investment and political commitment to provide prevention programs and services to families. To the credit of those in the South Australian Child Protection portfolio, the recommendations made by Coroners have translated into reform. However, a legacy of this background is that the Department of Child Protection is now responsible for the implementation of the Social Worker Registration Scheme for the whole social work workforce in South Australia.

What will the South Australia Social Worker Registration Scheme look like?

The South Australian Government has moved forward to implement the Social Worker Registration Scheme. Whilst much of the Scheme has already been decided and confirmed in the legislation there are still many unknowns and much of these are yet to be determined for the South Australian social worker. The Social Worker Registration Act 2021 requires the establishment of a Social Worker Registration Board to be appointed with seven members (at least four with extensive experience in social work, one with legal expertise and one community member). The Board will have broad powers and significant discretion in how it interprets the legislation. For example, the Act provides powers to the Board to "determine scopes of practice for social work profession" and the Board can take action against social workers for "unprofessional conduct"—a threshold in this context yet to be determined. Other interpretations the Board will make include "unprofessional conduct", "fitness to practice", "good character", and a social worker's "reputation".

Social work should be a nationally registered health profession

The most appropriate means of regulating social workers is through the NRAS, administered by AHPRA. The AASW strongly advocates for this outcome.

AHPRA is national and has a well-established framework, standards and thresholds regulating fifteen professions, including similar allied health professions such as psychologists and occupational therapists.



The benefits of registration through AHPRA include:

- a consistent, national regulation scheme for all states and territories
- social workers being recognised and registered as a health profession
- workforce mobility: social workers can easily relocate and work across Australian borders, and attend to crises at short notice, such as natural disasters
- an independent regulator at arm's length from the workforce and government departments
- well-established experience and guidance around professional regulation, which can be tailored to suit our profession by a National Board of Social Workers.

What can you do?

Inclusion of social workers in the NRAS requires the support of state and territory Health Ministers. The AASW has been busy filling up Ministerial inboxes and meeting with Ministers to push for registration.

Now it is time for them to hear directly from you, our members, about this important reform. To join in the next phase of national advocacy, please write to your Minister for Health and seek their support for registration.

Find a letter template to your Minister for Health by clicking [here](#).

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First Nations' Voices

Being seen and heard

The aim of the Special Issue was to create a collection of articles by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and their supporters to promote, uphold, reflect and respect First Nations' voices, leadership, strengths and ways of working and healing.

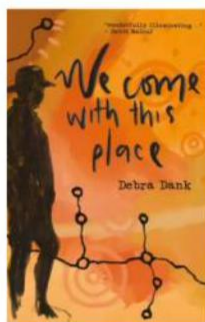
The recent [Australian Social Work Journal, Special Issue, July 2023](#), with Guest Editors Bindi Bennett, Jennie Briese and Sue Gillieatt, will inspire practitioners, researchers, policy makers, educators and students. Powerful articles in the collection appeal to us to take up the journey to decolonise social work practice; ensure the cultural connections and voices of Aboriginal children and their families are forefront in child protection services; learn from the experience of Torres Strait Islander migration from an insider's perspective; understand the benefits of youth mentoring; help

remove barriers preventing Indigenous women with violence-related injuries from accessing services; and advocate for the enactment of Indigenous data sovereignty.

These articles forge new ground in culturally responsive social work practice and help advance the key themes and challenges arising from the 2021 published guidelines now underpinning Journal practices ([Bennett, 2021](#)).

Two book reviews completed this July 2023 Special Issue collection:

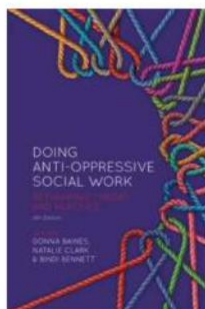
WE COME WITH THIS PLACE



We Come with This Place by Debra Dank, London, Echo Publishing, Bonnier Books UK, 2022, 252 pp., RRP AU\$29.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781760687397.

The rich personal narratives presented in this book can help non-Indigenous readers understand how oral histories and deep cultural meanings can inform our practice.

DOING ANTI-OPPRESSIVE SOCIAL WORK



Doing Anti-oppressive Social Work: Rethinking theory and practice (4th edition), edited by Donna Baines, Natalie Clark and Bindi Bennett, Fernwood Publishing, 2022, 359 pp., RRP AU\$90.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781773635552.

In this edited collection authors offer intersectional analyses on a range of topics including colonialism, ageism, ableism, gender and 2SLGBTQI+ theories and experiences, and challenge practitioners to enact anti-oppressive social work while being critically reflective of its western underpinnings.



About the author

Susan Gair is a supporter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work researchers. She is Editor of *Australian Social Work: The journal of the Australian Association of Social Workers* and Adjunct Associate Professor at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland.

Empowering ATSICHS Staff

“Responding to sexual violence” workshops

Recognising the importance of providing both subject matter expertise and cultural sensitivity, a co-facilitation model was employed. This ensured that the workshops not only addressed the intricacies of responding to sexual violence, but also created a safe and culturally appropriate learning environment.

In September, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS) Brisbane staff participated in three workshops on “Responding to sexual violence”. The workshops, attended by 60 staff members, predominantly comprised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals dedicated to serving their communities.

David Stracey and Chloe Warrell, both AASW Accredited Mental Health Social Workers, developed and facilitated the workshops. David brought his profound subject matter expertise to the table, while Chloe, an Aboriginal woman highly skilled across the sector, played a pivotal role in ensuring that the training was culturally respectful, culturally safe and grounded. Her presence reassured staff that their cultural values and sensitivities were being acknowledged and valued. Both David and Chloe’s

dedication to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander models of practice and cultural protocols in training delivery contributed to increased learning and participation throughout the three days and demonstrated the power of effective collaboration in practice.

What set these workshops apart was the scenario-based learning model and the active involvement of the ATSICHS staff. They engaged enthusiastically in discussions, worked through multiple case studies and collaborated on ideas for an ATSICHS infographic. ATSICHS now have the opportunity to take these ideas and develop a valuable reference for staff, offering guidance on implementing culturally safe responses to disclosures of sexual violence. It’s a tangible outcome that will continue to benefit the organisation and its clients.

The feedback received from the participants speaks volumes about the workshops’ effectiveness. The staff reported gaining valuable insights and knowledge, and they appreciated the safe space created for them to learn and grow. This positive response is a testament to the dedication of the facilitators and the commitment of ATSICHS to empower its staff.

Looking ahead, ATSICHS is already gearing up for the next set of workshops with AASW scheduled for January and February 2024. These workshops promise to further enhance the skills and knowledge of the staff, empowering them to continue making a positive impact within their communities.

•
Renee Diniz is a Team Leader, Project Manager for AASW.



(left to right):
Aliesha Kate
(ATSICHS),
Chloe Warrell
(facilitator),
Renee Diniz
(AASW) and
David Stracey
(facilitator)

AASW Advocacy for Reconciliation and Self-determination

As part of our continuing activism for social justice, AASW is always looking for opportunities to promote the right of First Nations Peoples to self-determination. We consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to inform our submissions and amplify their voices.

Recent submissions in which we advocated for better ways:

- Aboriginal action plan against family violence
- Parliamentary inquiry into possible human rights legislation
- Human Rights Commission's inquiry into the youth justice system
- WA Parliamentary inquiry into forced adoptions
- Raising the age of criminal responsibility

SUPPORTING CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

The AASW has been a supporter of constitutional recognition since it was first suggested by then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in 2015. We also submitted to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Indigenous Voice to Parliament in 2021 putting the position of our members that constitutional recognition will be more effective than legislated change.

The AASW held a webinar for members as part of NAIDOC week, featuring Prof. Tom Calma AO. As a social worker, he explained the proposal, its background and the positive changes it will make. The webinar is entitled "[Walk with Us to a Better Future](#)".

The AASW is represented in [Allies for Uluru](#). This broad coalition consists of more than 270 community and public sector organisations from across the whole of society. Its purpose is to:

- share information and resources for increasing the level of community awareness of the Uluru Statement From the Heart
- promote the benefits for all of us from accepting the invitation in the Uluru Statement.
- encourage people to vote [yes](#) in the referendum.

As social workers we know that better decisions are made when they have input from the people who will be affected by them. Our social policy and advocacy work shows us examples

where current systems continue to fail our First Nations Peoples.

The AASW made a public statement in support of a YES vote on 5 July. National President Vittorio Cintio stated:

We acknowledge the pain of past and continuing racism and structural inequality. We walk with our First Nations Peoples. We recognise their sovereignty and their continuous connection with the land over 65,000 years.

We encourage all members to vote YES in the referendum on 14 October 2023.



Focus Editor: We recognise that there are a variety of views about the referendum within our profession and within Indigenous communities. Please also read the National President's Report in this issue.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Members Are Growing

NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS

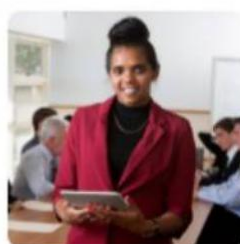


NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS MEMBERS BY BRANCH AS AT 30 JUNE 2023



INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK DISCUSSION GROUP

Did you know we have an Indigenous Social Work discussion group in the community hub? [Log in to My AASW](#) and visit the community hub.



Indigenous Social Work

Owner
Robyn Farrands

Members
112 Members

Last Activity
11/9/2023, 10:04 am

[See Group](#)

PAST AASW PODCASTS

On Thursday 28 September, 6:30pm-8:00pm (AEST) we celebrated AASW First Nations members who have elevated social work through their PhD research and careers.

AASW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Director, and the Chairperson for the podcast, Prof. Susan Green was joined by:

- Dr Karen Menzies (Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Newcastle)
- Dr Tjanara Goreng Goreng (Indigenous scholar, leader and visionary)
- Dr Lorraine Muller (Indigenous Australian researcher).



48:49 Jul 12, 2023

"WALK WITH US TO A BETTER FUTURE": THE VOICE TO PARLIAMENT AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Professor Tom Calma AO is one of Australia's most respected human rights and social justice campaigners. He is Senior Australian of the Year 2023, and he is a social work graduate. Prof Calma AO is a Kungarakana Elder and has worked for more than 45 years at local, community, state and international levels championing the rights, responsibilities and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [See more.](#)



19:57 Feb 1, 2023

HISTORY IS SO RECENT

AJ Williams-Tchen provides Mental Health First Aid training to groups and organisations, and cultural awareness training to health professionals. Throughout all this work, AJ makes sure participants spend time listening to each other's stories. AJ believes in the power of storytelling as our most powerful tool to drive social change. He practises this himself and describes his experience as a member of the Stolen Generation. [See more.](#)



21:29 Mar 3, 2021

WHERE TWO WATERS MEET: DECOLONISING THE HUMAN SERVICES

Although she has two Ph D's, Dr Lorraine Muller considers herself only one among many knowledge holders. Her book proposes a process for decolonising our work in the human services and contains many messages for social workers. In this conversation, she describes why and how we can all commence this journey with hope and respect. [See more.](#)



FEATURE ARTICLES

Be Aware of Placing Additional “Cultural Load” onto First Nations Colleagues

AJ WILLIAMS-TCHEN

In a workplace setting, the term “cultural load” is the invisible workload that employers and colleagues often place on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff by getting them to provide cultural knowledge, education and support around Indigenous issues from a cultural lens without thinking of the possible consequences that this has on the First Nations staff member.



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.

It is important to remember, as discussions around the referendum are occurring, that issues around constitutional change and reform, having a voice in parliament, treaty, recognition and Aboriginal rights have a significant impact on First Nations staff personally, with regards to their own beliefs and those of their family and their community. We see the divisive commentary, blatant racism and discriminatory words used on social media forums, and we hear the comments (both positive and negative) from our clients and other colleagues and from people in the community. Many of the comments can cause significant stress to the social and emotional wellbeing of the individual.

Colleagues and managers don't always see the additional “cultural load” that First Nations staff carry around with them on a daily basis. Common examples of cultural load include:

- caring for family and community members
- attending funerals and participating in “sorry business”
- living and working off country
- sitting on advisory boards and committees
- racism

- tokenism
- lateral violence.

Then add the expectations from colleagues to provide cultural knowledge about Aboriginal history, events and experiences and the burden is heightened. Additional “cultural load” can increase the risk of vicarious trauma for individuals, as they often have to revisit painful individual and family experiences, talk about differing views of community, while at times exploring their own identity journey.

Research in the area of Aboriginal cultural load such as that by the Diversity Council Australia & Jumbunna Institute (2020), the Australian Public Sector Commission (2023) and Sivertsen, Ryder & Johnson (2023) show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people commonly bear the cultural load within the workplace.

With workplaces focusing more on improving diversity and inclusion, there has been significant input from current employees who identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, keen to see cultural change occur, and who usually volunteer to attend meetings, provide opinion, contribute to policy formation, and agree to participate in the education

of their colleagues, all without alterations to current workload and/or payment for their cultural supports.

It is important to help First Nations-identifying staff to reduce this additional workplace “cultural load”. You can do this by *not*:

- handing over the sole preparation of NAIDOC and reconciliation events for them to manage
- expecting them to ensure that deliverables in Reconciliation Action Plans are implemented and met
- making them the cultural consultant on every Indigenous issue that occurs in the workplace
- making requests of them to provide cultural advice on how you manage clients
- asking continual questions around their cultural identity
- discussing aspects of “cultural load” tolerance in front of other staff
- introducing them as “this is our Aboriginal worker”
- expecting them to provide cultural awareness to staff either in a formal or informal setting.

The care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is important not just for their cultural safety, but also in ensuring an environment that does not add additional pressures.

•

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Reflections on the Joys and Pitfalls of Being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Worker

SUE GREEN

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers generally enter the position because of their commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. It is their own experiences, passion and aspirations that bring them into a profession that is based upon social and structural change, human rights and social justice. Whilst there are many positive aspects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers when working with and for their people and communities, there are also many negative aspects as well.

It is such a honour to be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker who gets to work directly or indirectly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. To know that you are making a difference for your own people is rewarding. It is rare that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker does not have their own personal experiences of racism, discrimination, disadvantage and the many other issues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities face, allowing them to bring with them an expertise and understanding that many other social workers would not have. This includes the firsthand understanding of the worldviews and cultural realities of their clients.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients frequently want to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker so that they do not have to explain every detail and underlying reason for what they are experiencing and/or thinking; nor is it likely the social worker will minimise or provide justification for what they are

experiencing. Being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is to be a rare and valued part of any team, workplace or community. Knowing that you can work with your own people and community and that you can make a difference to their lives makes one proud. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers are role models for others in their communities: showing young people (and older) that going to university and gaining a degree is attainable, having a job that you like can happen, and being able to change the world we live in is possible.

However, all these positive aspects do not come without tremendous hurdles and barriers. These hurdles and barriers are everywhere—within our communities, workplaces and organisations—and occur at every step of the journey. Being a social worker within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community does not come easy and even for people within their own community where they are known, they must still prove themselves. Social work still carries the legacies of its past, especially the profession's involvement



About the author

Sue Green is a Galari, Wiradyuri (Aboriginal Australian) woman, mother and grandmother. She is currently the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Director on the AASW Board of Directors. Sue is the Professorial Fellow in the Yindyamarra Nuguluway Centre at Charles Sturt University.

in the Stolen Generations and within child protection today.

If an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is working within their own community, they are likely to have to work with people they are related to, which creates lots of ethical dilemmas, that the profession still struggles to come to terms with, so there is little guidance and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers within this situation. When working in one's own community, there are a whole lot of expectations from the community upon the worker that might conflict with the organisation where the social worker is employed. Being the go-between between the community and organisations is extremely difficult a lot of the time and it is a rare experience where this conflict of interest does not exist.

Furthermore, if the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker is not from that community, they must prove their worth and be accepted by the community and rarely do organisations take this into account, because they basically think that an Aboriginal person can enter into any community. Thus, the expectations upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers can be a difficult tightrope to walk between the community's expectations and requirements on the one hand and the organisations' expectations and requirements on the other.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers do not stop being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they become social workers. The struggles that face Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities continue in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers on a daily basis. Racism does not simply go away and, in fact, whilst it does not always increase, one becomes aware that racism exists in even more places that one expects. It is shocking to find racism in the very places and people where you expect it

not to exist, including within the social work profession.

Whilst there are a small number of individual social workers who are racist, most racism in the profession occurs through unconscious bias and in the structures. The structures of social work are "white" and this whiteness provides a normality approach to theory, practice and relationships. Most social workers are horrified by the suggestion that racism is embedded within their social work workplace, but the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can easily provide examples of the racism they experience within the profession.

The judgements Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers face from other social workers about their ability to do the job, allegations of special treatment for themselves or for clients or the "I do not see colour" or "I treat everyone exactly the same", and then the other end of the spectrum where they want to look after you and help you all the time and thus fail to recognise that you are their equal and maybe even more experienced than they are.

There is also the thought that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the same, have the same experiences and think and believe the same things. For non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders it can be quite confusing or even threatening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not to agree or to want quite different things.

To be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander continues to be seen as a deficit and in need of assistance or "fixing". It isn't just the social work profession where this occurs, it is even more embedded within organisations. Any issues or problems regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or communities are seen as something the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers (or social worker) should manage or fix. This includes even when

the issue or problem, such as racism, does not originate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When systems do not work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, it is not the system that is at fault but the way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander do not comply that is the problem. If there is an issue with other staff around cultural awareness, safety or responsiveness, or a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander realities, then it is the responsibility of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker to educate the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers.

Anything that ticks the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander box becomes the responsibility of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker. When the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker becomes burnt out and is unable to keep doing the job, then the problem is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker or their ability rather than the workplace and the expectation placed upon the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker.

Whilst it could appear from the above that being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker is the worst thing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person could be, this could not be further from the truth. Yes, it is hard, but it is also rewarding. When you see the results in individuals and in communities and know that you were a part of that or when you see some change in the way that organisations do something or even changes in government policies and practices, you know it is worth it. With the growing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers, our profession is changing and working to dismantle its own whiteness. To be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social worker is to be a part of achieving justice and creating a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers are role models for others in their communities: showing young people (and older) that going to university and gaining a degree is attainable, having a job that you like can happen, and being able to change the world we live in is possible.

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12 Tips for Working with Aboriginal Elders

AJ WILLIAMS-TCHEN

Elders within First Nations communities are respected for their knowledge, stories, language, art and songs. For Aboriginal workers, they are our cultural teachers. They need to be looked after with great "Respect" at all times.

While many of them are active participants in their community and are caring for their children and grannies, they are also consulted upon by organisations to provide guidance and support for service delivery areas, work on Advisory committees, and on Reconciliation Action Plans.

Things to consider when working with an Aboriginal or any First Nations Elder:



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. Ensure that the Elder has transport to attend meetings, or arrange cab vouchers if possible.
2. As soon as they arrive, make sure that you offer them a cup of tea or coffee. A biscuit or sandwich or two would also not go astray.
3. Know the proper way to address the Elder. Do they prefer to be referred to by their first name or by the respectful terms of "Uncle" or "Aunt"?
4. Find out before the meeting where they are from (language group) and their position in their community. Are they a Traditional Custodian, or a respected Elder community member?
5. Understand the diversity of Elder experiences. Some are Stolen Generation members; some have or have not finished schooling. Some have attended university, while others may have low health, low mental health and low computer literacy. Be prepared for all factors.
6. Some Elders may use terminology that we might now in 2023 see as offensive. Some Elders may refer to themselves as being "half-caste" or "quarter-caste". It is important to understand that these words were once used in legislation, and, growing up, these are the legal terms that the Elder may have had to identify as.



7. Asking Elders to share their personal and family stories can be triggering for them. Child removals, life on missions and reserves, and experiences in state care can cause unsolved grief and loss to come out in the hours and days following the discussions. Take care of them and always follow up with them in the next few days.
8. Be aware of any local cultural protocols that you may need to follow, so you don't embarrass yourself and cause the Elder shame.
9. Be aware of any community politics that exist. Know what they are, but don't get involved. It is important to understand that many Elders are involved with native title claims, and may or may not be comfortable working with Elders from other groups that they may be in dispute with.
10. If meetings are scheduled prior to lunch, it might be worth thinking about ordering some catered lunch. If there is any food left over from the catering, offer Elders the opportunity to take it home with them.
11. Understand that many Elders have chronic illnesses. They may often have to attend medical appointments, participate in "sorry business" within families and deal with other family issues that arise. This means that meetings might need to be postponed at the last minute.
12. Think about re-imbursement for the Elders' time and cultural knowledge. This might involve payment for services through an invoice, or through a gift voucher or card for a monetary value.

While the traditional roles of our Elders may have changed over time, what has not changed is that we need their support and endorsement to work effectively with community and the issues that affect our communities.

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Yindyamarra Winhanganha

SUE GREEN

In recent times there is a lot of focus on, and talk about, Indigenous knowledges. However, there is limited to no acknowledgement that it is Indigenous peoples who hold these knowledges, and these knowledges cannot simply be taken and applied outside of their cultural context. Here in Australia, it is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who hold the knowledges of the various countries that exist (historically and ongoing) across this continent.

Frequently when speaking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and social work practice, we generally refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and/or issues in the deficit. Even on an unconscious or subconscious level, it is seen that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are generally the clients or in need of assistance and support. It is social workers who assist and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

The Australian Association of Social Work complies with the International Federation of Social Workers, which recognises the importance of Indigenous knowledges for social work theory and practice (AASW 2020, p. 5). Therefore, the social work profession within Australia should be working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to develop their understanding of Indigenous Australian knowledges and be prepared to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in positions of expertise and not as just clients and a disadvantaged group who require the focus of social work practice.

It should also be pointed out that Indigenous knowledges within the Australian context are not just about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, but about all Peoples living within Australia. Australia has several unique landscapes and these impact

upon the way that society operates within those areas. Hence, there is not a single Indigenous group or knowledge system within Australia. Hence, social workers need to engage with the Indigenous nation where they live and/or work in order to successfully comply with the requirements and the values of Australian social work. Indigenous knowledges are based upon the country of the Indigenous nation that is located there.

For Wiradyuri, our language is our culture, and our culture is our language; the two cannot be separated. Our culture, as does the people, comes from country. Our language is the sounds of country. Each word has a lot of meaning and frequently cannot be directly translated into English, due to the difference in culture and worldviews. However, Wiradyuri people in wanting non-Wiradyuri people to live the correct way on country, do attempt to put Wiradyuri words and phrases into English. It is important that people live proper way so that country is well. If country is well, then people are well. Wiradyuri Elder and now ancestor Wongamar (2006, p. 31) states:

Look after the lands and rivers and the lands and rivers will look after you.



About the author

Sue Green is a Galari, Wiradyuri (Aboriginal Australian) woman, mother and grandmother. She is currently the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Director on the AASW Board of Directors. Sue is the Professorial Fellow in the Yindyamarra Nuguluway Centre at Charles Sturt University.

Also, our language tells us how to live proper way. Yindyamarra Winhanganha are two Wiradyuri words that have a lot of meaning for Wiradyuri people and tell us how we should live. The English translation of Yindyamarra is "respect, be gentle, polite, honour, do slowly" (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 485) and Winhanganha is "know, think, remember" (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 469). When these words are combined into the phrase Yindyamarra Winhanganha, the phrase means "the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in" (Green 2023).

The phrase Yindyamarra Winhanganha should underpin the values, principles and practices of social work. Social work is about human rights and social justice and ensuring equity for all (AASW 2020). To ensure that the values and principles of social work here in Australia are fully enacted upon and achieved, it is essential that Australian social work not only embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers, but allows them to lead with their cultural knowledge.

Indigenous knowledges tell us how to live well in the context of the country in which we live. The answers to the inequity amongst peoples and also to the harm to the environment, which directly impacts the wellbeing of people, is held within Indigenous knowledges. However, it must be remembered that one simply cannot take and implement Indigenous knowledges without the knowledge holders; in Australia these holders are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Yindyamarra
Winhanganha are
two words that
... tell us how we
should live. The
English translation
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'respect, be gentle,
polite, honour,
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Winhanganha
is 'know, think,
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phrase Yindyamarra
Winhanganha ...
means 'the wisdom of
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world worth living in'

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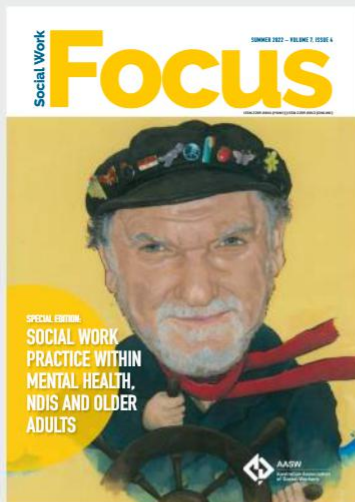
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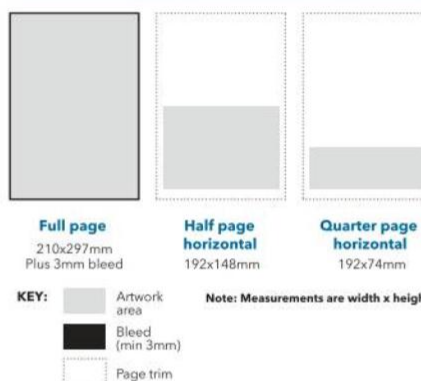
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