

WACOSS Conference 2006
Shaping the Future: Social Services & Solutions for Tomorrow
4th and 5th May 2006
Sheraton Perth Hotel
Rae Walter, WACOSS President
Welcome Address
8:50am – 9:00am, Thursday 4th May 2006

Protocol

- Acknowledge the Nyoongar people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today.
- Acknowledge dignitaries (will be notified)
- Thanks to Marie Taylor for Nyoongar Welcome to Country
- Welcome Keynote Speakers and Presenters, fellow Board Members, WACOSS Members and those that have traveled from overseas, interstate and from regional and remote areas of WA to be here for this event.

As President of WACOSS, I am delighted to welcome you here today, to the WACOSS Conference 2006. Held every two years, the WACOSS Conference is an opportune time to come together to learn, discuss and develop solutions to pressing sector and social issues in Western Australia. This year's Conference titled *Shaping the Future: Social Services and Solutions for Tomorrow*, provides us with an ideal occasion to engage in dialogue about the change that we want to see and in doing so, stimulate new ideas and inspire us all to act for a socially just future.

WACOSS has a long history of working to improve the quality of life of people disadvantaged by the inequities of our society – this year we celebrate our fiftieth birthday. For fifty years, WACOSS has been developing and strengthening the capacity of the non-government human services sector to assist all West Australians.

From the very beginning, at the heart of all WACOSS activities has been the belief that the mark of a civilised community is the support and help it gives to those most in need. Since 1956, WACOSS and our members have shared a vision of a socially just and sustainable West Australian society, where people care for each other and have access to the resources and opportunities necessary for their wellbeing. To achieve this vision, we have sought to be an effective influence on policies that promote the wellbeing of West Australians; to contribute to the existence of an effective, vibrant non-government human services sector; and to contribute to an informed public opinion on social issues.

Today, despite our best efforts, the non-government human services sector is in crisis. Agencies are struggling to address increasing client need both in the number of clients and the complexity of their problems, whilst being unable to meet the costs of service delivery. Existing services receive insufficient base funding to cover costs, particularly the increased cost of recruiting and retaining staff in an increasingly competitive environment. This crisis is resulting in

shrinking capacity, reduced service delivery and has dire consequences for those in need.

ACOSS recently released the Australian Community Sector Survey 2006 report, which outlines some alarming statistics. This report concludes that during 2004-05 in Western Australia:

- Respondent agencies provided services to 164,003 people, which is 5,265 people more than in 2003-04.
- Respondent agencies turned away 6,971 people, which is 2,066 people more than in 2003-04.
- Of the people turned away, 59% were eligible for the service but were turned away without receiving assistance, which indicates that the majority of the people who are not receiving assistance are being turned away because services are operating at maximum capacity and must ration access.

This means that during 2004-05 in Western Australia, 4,113 people in need were unable to receive the help that they needed because of the current crisis that exists in our sector.

The report also shows that:

- The workforce of the non-government human services sector is characterised by the dominance of voluntary labour, which constitutes 67% of the workforce of respondent agencies.
- In an effort to meet excess demand, agencies have to squeeze more out of their existing resources, which includes the use of increased unpaid staff labour.
- 58% of respondent agencies experienced difficulty attracting appropriately qualified staff during 2004-05.

These results provide compelling evidence of the increasing difficulties for the non-government community services sector in attracting and retaining expert and experienced staff, which further intensifies the crisis that currently exists within the sector.

In the face of these challenges, the sector continues to pull together and strive for good practice and efficiency. Community service agencies and organisations continue to seek advice, representation, and training opportunities from their Peak body, while Peaks continue to represent and advocate on behalf of their constituents and disadvantaged groups in our community.

The creation and continued development of the Western Australian Non Government Human Service Sector Industry Plan and the signing of the Statement of Partnership in November 2004, has seen the State Government demonstrate a strong commitment to working in partnership with Peak organisations, for the development of a strong and viable non-government community services sector.

Although, as in any relationship, the government and non-government sectors may hold different positions on issues, we have taken some significant steps forward by working together in developing the Industry Plan. We have achieved the Indexation Policy and the Funding and Purchasing Policy, during the first phase of the Industry Plan.

As I have mentioned, the capacity of our sector is currently limited by inadequate resourcing of core functions. We look forward to working with Stage Two of the Industry Plan – Sector Reform and Development – in an effort to address these issues.

With our access to government assured through our partnership agreement, the important, independent advocacy role of Peak bodies continues, without compromise – now more than ever we need to be a strong and powerful voice! We must continue to represent and give voice to the sector and to the most marginalised and disadvantaged members of society.

The non-government human services sector is crucial to ensuring the future well being of our communities, families and children, and we are at an important time in the development of the sector. While we need to look to the future with confidence, to do so we must address some tough questions and find convincing answers, for the sake of future generations.

Occasions such as this Conference provide excellent opportunities to learn from each other, to think outside our own assumptions, and to develop visions of how the non-government human services sector may best develop, in ways that draw from the rich diversities of experience available to all of us.

I hope that your experience at the Conference will be rewarding, inspiring and enjoyable, and you leave here with a real sense of having learned, shared, and achieved in ways that will really matter for many people.

Thank you and have a fantastic Conference.