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# Editorial: The Social Workers Registration Act (2003) – 10 years on

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Together with several other members of the Association, I attended the official launch and appointment of the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) on Wednesday 5 November 2003 at Turnbull House, Wellington. It was an occasion of much celebration for the profession and hope in regard to registration enhancing the credibility of social work as a profession and providing a system that set the bar through competence and accountability. The inaugural board appointment did an incredible job to set up the registration system within 12 months of their appointment, with the first person fully registered being Shannon Pakura on 9 December 2004. Since then the number of registered social workers has grown over the past ten years to the point where at 25 October 2013 there were more than 5500 people on the register.

This year is the 10th anniversary of the Social Workers Registration Act (2003). This issue of the *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review* aims to provide some food for thought about the past decade and the changes that have occurred with social workers' registration.

The articles in this issue provide a commentary on how registration has been experienced and received by the sector. In the first article, Gavin Rennie provides a social work educator's perspective which overviews the background to registration and canvasses the issues pertaining to the legislation, namely voluntary or mandatory and the inclusion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Following this discussion he then explores how, over the period of the last 10 years, the qualification level required for registration has increased from a diploma to a three year bachelor's degree, through to a four-year degree from 2017.

Barbara Gilray, who is the social work advisor for the SWRB, explores the current situation and future challenges facing social worker registration in Aotearoa New Zealand. She identifies challenges pertaining to supporting registration, the compliance cost for NGO sector, cyber social work, cultural considerations and then need to research the benefits of registration. A notable absence from this issue is an article from Child, Youth and Family about that organisation's experiences of the implementation of social workers registration. This absence was despite an extended invitation to submit an article. The reticence of Child, Youth and Family to discuss this topic is particularly perplexing given that Barbara Gilray highlights that social workers from Child, Youth and Family are the largest proportion of registered social workers (i.e. 1132 and 29%).

The next two articles provide organisational perspectives on the implementation of registration. Erica Henderson and Kim Fry from MidCentral District Health Board detail the accomplishments and the challenges they encountered and emphasise the importance of engaging an entire organisation to raise awareness and support for health social workers to not only achieve registration but stand alongside other regulated colleagues. Pam Smith, on the other hand provides an insightful commentary on the implementation and impact

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of registration within Family Works Southland, the Child and Family Support Service of Presbyterian Support, Southland, a non-government organisation (NGO). This article also signals the importance of the capability building undertaken in the NGO sector through the NGO study awards and the need for this and other support to continue should mandatory registration come into force in the near future.

The last ten years has seen a growing disquiet in society regarding increasing inequality and the effects of poverty on the most vulnerable. Mike O'Brien argues that poverty is a central focus for social work and social workers, but that in the professional era it has received much less attention than previously. Mike examines how the ANZASW code of ethics and SWRB code of conduct differ in their expectations of social workers on social justice issues. He asserts that managerialism and neo-liberalism together with the incorporation of the postmodern language of difference and diversity have been the focus of the social work profession's attention at the expense of the effects of poverty. He calls for social workers to reassert their collective voice on issues of poverty to meet their ethical obligations for competent practice.

The next article by Liz Beddoe and Jan Duke, explores the continuing professional development (CPD) activities undertaken by registered social workers. Liz and Jan found from their audit of CPD logs that whilst registered social workers undertook a range of activities, there is a need for more planned CPD that enhanced reflective practice.

This issue concludes with the reflections of Rose Henderson, who was the President of the Association from 2003 to 2009. This reflective piece, transcribed and edited from an interview with Kieran O'Donoghue, overviews the challenges and changes that have occurred for the Association over the past ten years and the on-going confusion within the sector about the difference between the regulatory authority (SWRB) and the professional body (ANZASW).

There is much food for thought in this issue. My own personal reflection having read these articles is that the issues identified by the 37 submitters in 2002 on the Social Workers Registration Bill (2001) remain outstanding. These were mandatory registration and the protection of the title social worker, the inclusion of the Treaty of Waitangi in the legislation, the Board composition and the complexity of the registration process. After 10 years, it is not the need for social worker registration that is in question. It is "how" the registration system is applied, together with its scope. To quote a famous song by Tracey Chapman, my question to the Minister of Social Development regarding mandatory registration and a Treaty-based system is "If not now, then when?"