

Resolutions Consultancy, AASW (WA branch) and SPSW present:

# Social Work: What We Do, What We Know, Who We Are

**A day of exploration with:  
Professor Eileen Munro and Dr Andrew Turnell**  
*Convenor: Associate Professor Fran Crawford*

Social Work has a long history of struggling with its professional identity. From the establishment of the profession as industrialisation gained pace we have wondered and been challenged that perhaps we aren't a profession at all.

The challenges are usually built from the assertion that Social Work cannot lay claim to a theory base uniquely its own, therefore the profession is derivative, more para than a 'true' profession like medicine, law or psychology. The social work canon reflects these anxieties and often seems to manifest deep collective self-doubts. Social work academics, associations and our literature certainly champion the profession but as we seek to stake a claim for our identity, our thinking often seems to miss the mark and at worst, can seem a touch embarrassing, as if perhaps 'dame social work doth protest too much'.

In this interactive day workshop Professor Eileen Munro and Dr Andrew Turnell will take direct aim at this issue seeking to draw on their careers and experiences to stake a more robust claim for what social workers do (action), what we think (theory) and who we are (identity).

The day workshop will be grounded in presentations from Eileen and Andrew and both will incorporate exercises to allow participants to engage with each other in small groups. Time will also be made for questions and discussion as a whole group. In this broader discussion, Eileen and Andrew will respond to and engage each other through the day. Fran Crawford will act as convenor and will serve as our moderator for a final plenary session that will focus on issues and questions identified by participants during the day.

This training aims to grow social workers' confidence in their professional identity, judgment and practice in the whole gamut of roles the profession encompasses. It will be particularly beneficial for practitioners operating in high-risk contexts and in multi-disciplinary teams where professional judgment is critical, assisting them to be more confident, robust and evidence based in their decision-making. The training will also equip team leaders, managers, researchers and academics to elicit and grow greater confidence and strength from the social workers they lead and teach.

**Monday  
August 16, 2010**

## Venue

Tompkins Park,  
Canning Hwy, Alfred Cove

## Time

9.30am to 4.30pm

**Cost** (Includes lunch and morning and afternoon tea)

\$175.00

\$150.00—AASW & SPSW members

\$60.00 — Full-time Students

## Registrations

Online at:

[www.signsofsafety.net/1008-perth](http://www.signsofsafety.net/1008-perth)

## Enquiries

[jeremy.dvt@signsofsafety.net](mailto:jeremy.dvt@signsofsafety.net)

***“If practice is a bird in flight, theory is so often a dead parrot at the bottom of a cage.”***



Resolutions Consultancy—[www.signsofsafety.net](http://www.signsofsafety.net)

# A Little More Background to the Day

Starting from radically different initial views, Eileen and Andrew have both, over the years, revised and deepened their understanding of what social work can and should be and, in the process, their thinking has converged to a surprising extent. Eileen and Andrew's thinking has been influenced by an ongoing dialogue they have maintained over the past 6 years. This workshop will be an opportunity for publicly

tracing the professional and intellectual journeys they have both made and testing whether they share a robust account of what social work skills, knowledge, and purposes can be or whether it is only a surface similarity covering serious disagreements. Eileen and Andrew are excited to lead this day's exploration and intend it to be vigorous and energising for all participants as together we seek to wrestle some honest light upon the critical issues of social work practice and identity at a time when the profession is at significant risk of being swamped by managerialism.

## Andrew Turnell



Andrew Turnell is an independent social worker, family therapist and child protection consultant. He is the co-creator of the Signs of Safety approach to child protection casework, an approach that was first developed collaboratively with many West Australian practitioners during the

1990's and continues to evolve as it is increasingly utilised internationally. Andrew teaches regularly around the world and acts as an ongoing consultant to child protection systems in Australasia, Europe, Japan and North America. While helping professionals and organisations working with family violence are over-organised by anxiety and failure, Andrew's work focuses on fostering, amplifying and describing, constructive on-the-ground casework and systems practices that create meaningful safety for children in high-risk cases. Andrew is currently preparing his third book, *Building Safety in Child Protection Practice: Working with a Strengths and Solution Focus in a Risk Environment*, to be published by Palgrave-Macmillan. For more information go to: [www.signsofsafety.net](http://www.signsofsafety.net)

## Eileen Munro



Eileen Munro is Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics. She was a social worker for many years before taking up an academic career. She has studied philosophy, in particular the philosophy of science, and this has fuelled her interest in the reasoning skills needed in social work. Her current

research interests are in how best to combine intuitive and analytic reasoning in risk assessment and decision making in child protection. She is also studying the role of the wider organisational system in promoting or hindering good critical thinking. Eileen has published extensively across a wide range of social work topics and her most well known book *Effective Child Protection* is now in its second edition. More information about Eileen is available at the London School of Economics website: [www2.lse.ac.uk](http://www2.lse.ac.uk)

***"I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on the near side of complexity, but I would give my right arm for the simplicity that can be found on the far side of complexity—Oliver Wendell Holmes"***



## ***Eileen's Take on Her Contribution***

To give background to her current views, Eileen will give a sketch of the changes in her thinking over her career since the 1970s. With a background in philosophy before training as a social worker, her starting point fitted well with the academic view at the time. Eileen believed that social work should be modelling itself on medicine and the sciences, seeking to create a body of formal knowledge that would slowly replace the fallible (inferior) intuitive, empathic approach that most social workers used in practice. She thought empirical research could produce general findings that could be used in different contexts. At this stage, if she had met Andrew she would have probably thought him a rather woolly-brained do-gooder and he might well have had equally negative views of her.

Over the years, Eileen's viewpoint has been gradually modified by experience and learning so that little remains of that original sense of certainty. The values underlying practice remain constant but virtually everything else has been radically revised. She will argue that the scientific model held up to social workers has for too long held on to a discredited view of science and, in the process, discredited much of what is best in social work practice. The messiness of everyday practice should not be viewed as a problem to be eliminated but the reality of living in a complex world and one we need to grapple with, without pretending it is simple, predictable or controllable. In this context, the managerialist approach of recent years is seriously misguided and slowly smothering the skills of social workers. Descriptions of what social workers do should not be limited to counts of simple bureaucratic tasks but need to engage with the complexity of the reasoning behind their actions.



## ***Andrew's Take on His Contribution***



If you want to terrorise a social work practitioner just ask them what theory they draw upon in their work. As Professor Jan Fook observes it is 'old news' that practitioners make little use of formalised theory. Andrew will suggest that fundamentally the social work profession

has failed to figure out how to stake a claim for its everyday frontline work because we've been too caught up in theorising from 27 000 feet. What social work practitioners actually do is decidedly messy and complex, practitioners themselves almost always struggle to know whether they've succeeded or failed and the difference can be a hair's breadth. Everyday social work practice resists neat categorisation and theorising. Not surprisingly then practitioner's usually don't know how to stake a claim for their practice and academics get pretty frustrated trying to help them in the task, and in the words of a US academic most social work theory has all the pleasure of 'chewing on cardboard'.

Drawing on a 30-year career practicing and standing alongside practitioners Andrew has become increasingly convicted that the social work profession needs to do the hard work of assertively and unselfconsciously laying claim to the deep channels of practice wisdom that are at the core of what we do. Since so much social work talk is sanitised Andrew is planning to talk direct and dirty to describe his ideas about how to do this and the difference it can make for the profession.