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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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**Amanda Nickson,
James Cook University**

Achieving social justice for Social Workers: Peer supervision, an accessible and effective option for supervision in the face of organisational constraints.

The value of supervision is such that regular professional supervision is required by the Australian Association of Social Workers for Social Workers to maintain Accredited Status. However, in many workplaces, particularly in rural and remote locations, Social Workers may have difficulty accessing supervision. Two recent Australian state Health Department studies looking at recruitment and retention of professionals in remote areas (Cuss, 2005) and (Symons, 2005) both cite the lack of professional supervision as the main contributing factor to high staff turnover.

This paper reports on the findings of a research project that is a qualitative, action research study looking at the experience of Social Work peer supervision in small groups using technology (phone and video links). Social Workers in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia participated in peer supervision groups once a month for 12 months and evaluated their experiences. Focus groups and participant interviews also inform the data.

This research proposes some options for workers that provide solutions for supervision.

**Dr Christine Morley and Dr Selma Macfarlane,
Senior Lecturers, Social Work, University of the
Sunshine Coast**

What are the possibilities and responsibilities for Social Work to further a social justice and human rights agenda in a neo-liberal context?

This paper explores this question through the prism of ethical practice. Progressive Social Work programs place critical theories at the centre of curricula and link them explicitly with the distinct value and ethical base of our profession. In this paper we argue that critical approaches to education and practice are vital in identifying and resisting Social Work practices which complicitly embrace neo-liberal principles. We further suggest that critical reflection assists practitioners to engage in ethical practice which privileges human rights and social justice ideals, and to generate transformative possibilities for emancipatory social change.

**Dr Deb Miles, James Cook University and
Dr Robyn Mason, Monash University**

Whatever happened to the "F" word? Challenges for women-specific services.

Feminist services in Australia were established in the 1970s in response to compelling evidence that women's wellbeing was not well served by the existing health and social service systems. Since that time the women's services sector has experienced ebbs and flows in government and community support, a growing commitment to professionalism and varied success in influencing social policy. Over time, however, the use of the word "feminist" to describe service philosophy and service provision has diminished.

In the last decade an increasing neo-liberal focus on service provision has presented challenges for services addressing women's issues such as sexual assault and family violence. Many services continue to apply a gendered analysis to their work, contrary to an increasing trend in funding agreements to de-gender policy and practice.

This paper will explore policy and practice examples from women's services in Queensland and Victoria, with a view to understanding how services are reframing and resisting these developments. Our analysis will assess whether it is timely to revive the 'F' word.

Stream 3

**Professor Lesley Chenoweth and Associate Professor
Donna McAuliffe, Griffith University**

Statutory work in rural contexts: Managing the tensions of living and working in small communities.

Living and working in small communities poses challenges for many professionals in the execution of their daily work-tasks. The juggling of multiple roles which straddle both their professional and personal worlds becomes an ongoing negotiated space of conflicting responsibilities and allegiances with increased potential for ethical dilemmas (Fertman, Dptson, Mazzocco & Reitz, 2005; McAuliffe, 2005a). When the nature of the work includes a statutory requirement, that is carrying some legal responsibilities such as mandatory reporting, policing or the regulation of mental health patients, the frequency and intensity of these dilemmas are likely to be increased. This paper presents findings from an Australian Research Council project which studied the experiences of professionals and the strategies they used to manage conflicts and tensions. The paper reports results from an online survey of different rural professionals (N >700) and in-depth interviews with a further 20 practitioners.