



Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network Newsletter

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1. FEED BACK ON THE WORKING GROUP WORKSHOP

Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network organised a Working Group workshop and it in Johannesburg on the 19th and 20th May 2009. Organisations represented were:

- NACCW
- Childline
- Children's Institute
- DICAG
- RAPCAN
- Umtata Child Abuse Resource Centre
- Child Justice Alliance
- Community Law Centre
- Catholic's Bishop's Conference – Parliamentary office
- Catholic Institute for Education
- NACOSA
- CINDI
- Save the Children – UK
- Centre for Child Law
- Child Welfare JHB
- National Welfare Forum
- NECDA and Katlehong ELRU
- Kidshaven

- South African Council of Churches
- TREE
- Disabled People of South Africa
- Family & Marriage Association of South Africa

The purpose of the Working Group meeting was to discuss the Social Service Professions Bill and plan for consultation with the various occupational groups that may be defined as social service practitioners. There were presentations by network members and invited guests on the first day, in depth discussion and planning on the second day.

2. FEEDBACK ON THE PROVINCIAL WORKSHOPS

The Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network (SSPAN) partnered with the National Welfare Forum in organising provincial workshops on the Social Service Professions Bill and to ensure the participation of social service practitioners in the formulation of social service, welfare and development policies. The purpose of these workshops was to familiarise social service practitioners with the Social Service Professions Bill and discuss how they can get involved in the parliamentary process.

National Welfare forum organised and coordinated logistics of the workshops and the Children's Institute facilitated the content of the workshops. A workshop schedule was developed in consultation with NWF provincial coordinators.

The workshops were designed to last approximately 6 hours (including one hour for lunch), and split into the following components:

- Introduction (1 hour) - session on Developmental Social Welfare, and the new legislation affecting social services. Reflection on practitioners' roles and the need for multi-disciplinary teams (MDT).
- Overview of the Social Service Professions Bill (2 hours) - presentation followed by question and answer session.
- Responses to the Bill (1 hour, plus 45 mins) - participants were split into small groups to discuss the Bill. During the feedback to the plenary, advice was be given on how to structure legislative amendments.
- Presentation on parliamentary advocacy and the role of SSPAN (15 mins)

Invites were targeted at attracting different occupational groups within the social service professions. Representation of these occupational groups had been balanced for the most part. The following occupational groups had generally been represented in the workshops:

- (a) Social workers;
- (b) Child and youth care workers;
- (c) Early childhood and development workers;

- (d) Community development workers;
- (e) Youth development workers;
- (f) Home based care workers; and
- (g) Volunteers;

As part of the introductions, participants were asked to share challenges they faced in delivering services to their clients and the responses were quite common across the provinces and across occupational groups:

- Lack of resources, professional staff and infrastructure;
- Disparity in salaries paid by government and NPOs;
- High work loads versus low salaries;
- Brain drain;
- Increasing demands for services.

Time was allocated for a plenary session where participants were divided into small groups and given questions relating to the Bill to discuss and feedback on. The following is the summary of the feedback responses from the plenary:

- *Registration* : Section 27 as it is, is incomplete, there is a need for more categories to be added, like home based carers, youth workers and early childhood development workers. Adding categories would bridge the gap between professionals and practitioners and would provide for a multi-disciplinary team. Section 27 assists in outlining theoretical framework, as professions will not be registered without the theoretical knowledge. The section sets out boundaries between professions and making it easy for them to operate in multi disciplinary teams. Recognition of other groups will put pressure on them to get credible training. There need to be a clear definition of professional. It provides for more people to implement the Children's Act. The section would give credibility to services offered by various occupational groups that are not recognised by the current law and would increase accountability. It also releases pressure from social workers as work loads can now be shared. It is correct not to include probation workers as they should fall under justice and Early childhood development workers must be under catered for by the Department of Education. The categories appearing on the Bill need to be expanded to include youth workers and community development workers.
- *Section 9*: SACSSP is not representative of every social service practitioner and it is not democratically constituted. Departments of labour, finance, public works, public administration, safety and security should be included in council's structure. Section 9(1)(a) makes sense, but practically not enough representation for existing groups. The appointment process needs to be outlined clearly and be democratic, equitable,

representative and participatory. The Bill should be revised to include at least four people from NGO networks; or there must be one person per NGO sector. There must be a provisional clause for the transition period catering for representation in council without registration

- *Powers of the Minister, council, Professional boards:* Council's powers must be revised and it should be vested with more powers than the Minister as it is representative of practitioners themselves. Professional boards have no real powers in the Bill, except to be advisory to council.
- *Volunteers:* Volunteers are not catered for at all in the bill. There is a need for volunteers to be recognised and regulated. Volunteers need not be included in the Bill, the issue has to be addressed but not necessarily in this Bill. They need not to register, but the professionals using volunteers should be accountable for their volunteers and volunteers must always work under supervision of a registered member. Volunteers may only be registered if they have a qualification and work 20 hours a week. Volunteers must have specific training depending on the sphere of work.
- *Community service:* Professional boards must have power to decide the period that a practitioner should serve on community service, not the Minister. Minister may only impose community service to individuals that had bursaries from the department. Community service must be with full pay and benefits. One year should be enough in community service. Making community service compulsory will assist in getting much needed services to less appealing areas.

3. UPDATE ON THE SOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONERS BILL

The South African Council for Social Service Professionals is in the process of drafting new legislation which will replace the Social Service Professions Act. The first draft, the Social Service Professions Bill 2008 was published for comment in the Government Gazette in January 2008. The primary objective of the first draft was to "advance social justice by promoting developmental social services". Several redrafts were released in 2008, and the draft introduced in this paper dates from November 2008, and is called the Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill, 2008. It was released on the Council website in June 2009, and the site says that they are receiving comments. For more information visit <http://www.sacssp.co.za/>

The title of the Bill has changed with each draft. The original draft published in the Government Gazette had the title 'Social Service Professions Bill' mirroring the title of the current Act. The second draft was called the 'Social Service Practitioner Bill' and the latest draft is called the 'Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill'.

Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network (SSPAN) identified key debate areas on the Bill and they are:

- Powers and functions of the SACSSP;
- Composition of the SACSSP;
- Professional boards;
- Training and qualifications;
- Registration of social service professionals;
- Community service

Khululwa Seyisi and Lucy Jamieson co-authored a paper titled *Legal Brief: The Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill, 2008*. The paper seeks to introduce readers and give an overview of the Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill, compare it with the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978; and also provide a comparison of the Social Service Professions and Occupations Bi;; with the Built Environment Professions Bill and Health Professions Act as they establish bodies with similar powers and functions.

The paper can be accessed at <http://ci.org.za/site/frames.asp?section=lawreform> on the resources page.

Members and organisations are urged to read the paper as well as the Bill and write comments, which shall be sent to the Council. For further enquiries please contact Khululwa on 021 689 5404 or khululwa.seyisi@uct.ac.za.

4. UPCOMING COUNCIL NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

The current council's term of office is coming to an end soon. This is something that has been discussed in the SSPAN working group meeting in May. It was suggested that social service professionals must make sure that they participate in the nomination and election process, and ensure that they nominate individuals that carry the interests of the profession.

The Council has not yet published the nomination process and election dates; we shall spread of the information as soon as the dates are made public.

5. SUBSCRIBE TO THE NETWORK

If you subscribe to SSPAN you will receive policy briefs and progress updates. You will also become part of the broader network of organisations and individuals from civil society and government interested in participating in the making of the Social Service Professions Bill.

A subscription form is attached to this email and also available on the Children's Institute website: http://ci.org.za/depts/ci/plr/pdf/bills/SSPAN_SUBSCRIBER_FORM.doc.

If you would like to continue to receive updates, please complete the form and return it to Bronwen Williams on fax 021 689 8330 or e-mail bee.williams@uct.ac.za.