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## Human services: Australian explorations

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**Faculty of Health and Human Sciences  
Centre for Disability Research and Development  
Social Research and Development Report No. 42**

**HUMAN SERVICES:  
*AUSTRALIAN EXPLORATIONS***

**David Wiles**



**EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY**  
PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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# CENTRE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Social Research and Development Report No. 42

## HUMAN SERVICES: *AUSTRALIAN EXPLORATIONS*

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Lecturer in the Department of Human Services,  
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## FOREWORD

My guess is that many practitioners in the human services industry, as well as students of human services, have been asked at the proverbial Aussie backyard barbecue what they do for a living or are studying. Only to be asked, when they replied that they were a human service worker or student, to explain what that actually meant. An explanation which is not easy to formulate or articulate to others outside this field of interest.

Yet if human services are to receive community support or acclaim, those in the industry must be able to state clearly how human services came into existence, what they seek to do, how they will do it and how the community will benefit from this activity.

David Wiles in this publication helps us to respond to these questions in an easily understandable, rather than highly abstract, manner. Of special value is the way David, as shown by his choice of title '**Human Services: Australian Explorations**', embeds his writing in the Australian context.

He is to be congratulated for his efforts and I feel privileged to be able to recommend this monograph to you. It is an interesting attempt to elaborate on human services both as an emergent academic discipline as well as an important field of practice.

**Frank Ainsworth**

Coordinator, Human Services degree programme

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17 May 1993





**ABSTRACT**

**Human services** is an emergent field of study and work in Australia. Its definition is difficult, needing ongoing theoretical and empirical clarification. Despite the contemporary decline of the Australian welfare state, human services has emerged in cultural congruence with historic Australian notions of a 'fair go', of social equity, and of social egalitarianism. Human services constitutes a nascent profession, which — in the main — helps people with problems including mostly members of the social 'underclass'. Human services draws upon a variety of models, but the generic 'problem-solving' methodology applies across all of its fields of service. Thus human service interventions seek to alleviate immediate problems, such as locating resources or addressing crises, through mainly short-term therapy. However, human services also includes long-term case management, along with sweeping social engineering in its professional agendas. In many ways the future of Australian human services remains open to speculation.



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## INTRODUCTION

**Human services** is a recent field of study and professional work in Australia, and at present the term 'human services' elicits puzzled debate rather than providing definitional clarity. Thus this paper provides an overview of Australian human services according to the four themes of its 'context', 'players', 'models', and 'interventions'.

First, human services will be considered in terms of its 'context', its contemporary definition and historical emergence. Second, the exploration of human services will occur in terms of its 'players', the workers and clients who participate within its arena of agencies and communities. Third, the theories and therapies or 'models' which underpin the human services enterprise are examined to delineate its intellectual and professional processes. Fourth, human service 'interventions' are explicated in relation to individual crisis intervention and collectivist community intervention, thus demonstrating the broad range of human services concerns. Finally, the scope of the Australian human services enterprise is summarised, and possible futures are suggested.

## SECTION 1: DEFINING HUMAN SERVICES

The first point to note about the definition of 'human services' is its complexity. This term emerged in the North American intellectual and practice context of the 1960s and 1970s. In the Australian scene, Kim and Underwood (1991) suggest that human service is about 'meeting human needs'. Furthermore, according to Kim (1991) human services may be conceptualised as a response to 'problems arising from being human'.

The North American 'founding parents' of human services demonstrate additional approaches to its definition. Mehr (1988) writes about human services as being principally addressed to people falling 'outside the mainstream' of society. Thus human services is mostly concerned with people identified as belonging to the 'underclass' (Croft and Beresford, 1992; Robinson and Gregson, 1992). In an analogous way, Woodside and McClam (1990) describe human services as being about helping people to meet their 'problems in living'. Interestingly, everybody at some time or other will experience such 'problems in living' within the human life cycle, so the suggestion may be that the agenda of human services includes everyone. Another view is that derived from Harold McPheeters (quoted in Woodside and McClam, 1990) that human services is concerned with 'psychosocially dysfunctional people', demonstrating a more 'psychological' approach, that is, seeking to help individuals to adjust to problems in a favourable manner. So that is similar to a traditional 'welfare' methodology, face-to-face counselling of those in some type of trouble.

Human services may also be defined from an 'organisational' perspective, and according to Hasenfeld and English (1978) such human service organisations include concerns with socialisation, social control, and social integration. Obviously these concerns span very different types of roles and functions, from the educative role of 'socialisation', through the policing role of 'social control', to the happier 'motherhood' role of social integration.

Human services, as well, can be considered as an emergent area. It has appeared in reaction to extant disciplines and professions. For instance, psychology and psychologists have been around for decades, and the notion has been around for as long that the best way of addressing problems of individual adaptation is to talk them out to a professional counsellor on a weekly basis, possibly for years, but human services suggests that there are limits to the 'talking cure'. Human services is much more focussed on immediate solutions to dramatic and pressing problems experienced by the client in distress.

According to the literature it appears that there are two main concepts or themes in the way we think about 'human services'. There is the 'generic' concept of human services along with the 'umbrella' notion (Mehr, 1988). The generic concept suggests that the human service worker employs a cluster of values, knowledge, and skills which they can utilise from agency setting to

agency setting, and from target group to target group. The umbrella concept indicates that services can be provided in a multi-service agency setting.

Further, there is the issue of human services as an emerging 'profession' or occupational group. Of course, there are contradictory arguments about whether such increasing 'professionalisation' is to be welcomed or lamented (Sinclair, 1991). In a related way, the Australian Welfare State has always relied quite heavily on volunteers, yet in the eighties the voluntary sector has increasingly identified and sought to enhance the 'professionalism' of its non-paid workers. The human service literature, similarly, exhibits some ambivalence about the issue of professionalisation. On the one hand, the special characteristic of human services — at least in its origins — is said to be its closeness to the clients, unrestrained by the protocols and formalities and distance of professional boundaries. On the other hand, writers in human services document the emerging sense of 'discipline' and 'profession' as being praiseworthy in promoting effective service to clients, along with improving career path opportunities for the new 'professionals'. If this trend continues in Australia, then perhaps we should anticipate events such as 'Australian Human Service Workers Conferences', and 'Codes of Ethics for Human Service Workers', along with such academic or professional publications as the 'Australian Journal of Human Services'.

In defining Australian human services, then, we see that such definition is no easy matter, but we look to its North American intellectual and practice origins and see the discipline assisting people, that is, individuals and communities, towards change through a 'problem-solving' approach, with the suggestion that human services itself constitutes an emerging helping profession.

## SECTION 2: HELPING IN HISTORY

It is interesting to observe that the historical origins of modern human services and social work and social welfare lie in the previous 'charity' sector. The word 'charity' seems to have acquired a sense of stigma over time, perhaps due to the image of the middle-class, 'busybody' charity worker who sought to 'help', but did so in an offensive, judgemental, patronising, status-seeking, and ineffective manner. However, in its original sense of 'love and care' for others, charity is obviously a laudable social trait, and it is worth noting that present mainstream, western human service derives much of its origins from the historical 'church and charity' sector.

It is noteworthy to reflect that over the past century, Australia — in international terms — has gone backwards in its social welfare ideas and institutions. Thus, one hundred years ago, Australia, along with New Zealand, was considered as a 'social laboratory', exploring new ways to care for socially disadvantaged people. Across real class barriers, a common culture existed which proclaimed that 'fair play', 'equity', and 'social justice' should mediate social relations (Ward, 1958; Macintyre, 1981). The emerging Union movement grew against the backdrop of antagonism to authority in all its forms, a culture of collectivism and egalitarianism, along with the behavioural evidence of the nineties as to the realities of class conflict between 'bosses' and 'workers'. A century ago the concept of the Australian 'social laboratory' was that in this new country, favoured with natural resources and pleasant climate, far from the entrenched social conflicts and economic dislocations and class struggles of the 'old world', equitable and progressive social policies and programs could be established and developed. Unfortunately, though, Australia is not at the international forefront of social experimentation nowadays.

Nevertheless, we can be proud of some achievements in past Australian social policies and human services. For instance, back in 1909 the problem of Aged Income Security was at least recognised and addressed, if not entirely solved, with the commencement of the Age Pension. Similarly, almost two decades ago the 'discovery' or 'rediscovery' of 'poverty' occurred with the Henderson Poverty Inquiry of 1975. The Inquiry found that despite Australians' sanguine view of themselves as living in the 'lucky country', not everyone was enjoying the full range of advantages, opportunities, and services that should be available as a right of citizenship in a civilised society. Many groups, for example seniors, people with disabilities, and single parents, were found to be living in a state of poverty.

Essentially, social policy and human services are concerned with the identification of human need and its resolution. Some conceptual and measurement issues arise immediately. What are human needs? How do we measure them? Are such measurements entirely subjective? Can need, then, be measured objectively or scientifically? A seminal but simple overview of these matters was provided two decades ago by Jonathon Bradshaw in an article

which appeared in the now-defunct *New Society* (Bradshaw, 1972). Subsequent theorists have also addressed this issue, but none seem to have transcended Bradshaw's elegant four-level formulation of 'felt', 'expressed', 'comparative', and 'normative' dimensions of human need.

Remembering our historical origins in Australia, at any rate since white settlement two centuries ago, this nation was established as a gaol (Hughes, 1988). This unpleasant fact suggests that the convicts and their keepers brought along their 'cultural baggage', ideas about society and social welfare, from the Old World to this country. In this context Caroline Chisolm, arguably the 'founding mother' of Australian human services, pursued her goals of social justice and social reform (Burdon, 1993). Now back in Christianity and even further back in Judaism, there was a cultural and social recognition that the poor, the aged, the disabled, the widows, the orphans, the inmates of gaols had not necessarily entirely created their own miseries, and even if they had should still be the subjects of welfare concern. While not transplanted to the Australian colonies, the English Poor Law of 1601 is often cited as the first official acceptance that society was in some way responsible for the plight of the poor, and that the State had a moral responsibility to provide programs of relief. In Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was increasing intellectual speculation about what should be done about the social problems generated by the new industrial societies. Thus Voltaire and Marx and Weber and so on developed theories of social reform and social revolution.

Charity began to get organised. A most interesting pioneer group of this time was the Charity Organisation Society (COS). This body sought to dispense social welfare handouts in a 'scientific' manner to those assessed to be the 'deserving' poor, that is, the concern was with the efficient and economical distribution of scarce philanthropic resources. So the welfare 'goodies' were not distributed according to need or request, but rather were dispensed selectively to those judged to be 'deserving' and 'eligible'. Conversely, those assessed as 'undeserving' were not considered to be suitable subjects for assistance. At the same time in the North American context, Woodside and McClam (1990) draw attention to the Settlement House workers, those who assisted the migrants in their adjustment to American society, as the forerunners of modern social work and human services. More critically, and two decades ago, Piven and Cloward (1971) in their classic text on economy and poverty documented the generation of a social underclass of unemployed or underemployed people, as an inherent dynamic within capitalist societies.

Looking back into history, then, we see that across the centuries there have always been social reformers in existence who have cared for the socially disadvantaged sectors of the community, though sometimes these 'charity workers' were less than client-centred and non-judgemental in their approaches to the poor. Despite its unpromising origins as a gaol, early Australian social policies were pioneering and full of potential, as shown in the early establishment of an Age Pension system. However, by the mid-twentieth



century large pockets of poverty still remained to be documented by the Henderson Poverty Inquiry (1975), even before the Welfare State began to retreat

in the early eighties. Thus the question of historical 'progress' remains open, as it seems that Australia is now set upon reducing the established levels of social protection for its citizens, suggesting that issues of 'eligibility' for 'deserving' clients will become even more prominent, as welfare entitlements are reduced in the context of expanding social problems and contracting social welfare resources.

### SECTION 3: HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS

The term 'human service worker', then, is often used to describe this newly emerging helping professional. The human service worker is a 'generalist', an agent who can move about from agency to agency, and from target group to target group, constantly improving the repertoire of intervention skills. Thus can be identified an interesting and creative aspect of human service work, the possibility it suggests of constant self-improvement through service to others. The role, then, has the potential for continuing personal and professional self-improvement. Other motivations for human service work include the sense of identity provided, the need for a livelihood — any livelihood — and the people-meeting character of the work. Human service work, though, is not highly lucrative, at least in general and at present.

A range of key values in human services can be identified, that is, implicit values without which it would not be able to function at all effectively. Across modern human service agencies, the key cluster of essential values includes 'acceptance', 'tolerance', 'individuality', 'self-determination', and 'confidentiality'. While these common or shared values obtain across the human service organisations as the 'conventional practice wisdom', it is also clear that the personal values or 'world view' of the human service worker will shape the helping process. What is required is awareness of how our personal value systems may influence the perception of clients and the subsequent worker intervention. Thus increasing levels of self-awareness, developing throughout the professional career path, should enhance the effectiveness of the human service worker.

An interesting theoretical tension exists within much of this human service literature. The story-line of these books (Mehr, 1988; Woodside and McClam, 1990) suggests that the distinctive quality and value of human services in the past has been its closeness to consumers, its lack of professionalisation and professional distance, its amateur aspect. Yet as these texts proceed the stories seem to change, and the increasing 'professionalisation' of human services is portrayed as a positive and progressive development, which should be promoted by educators and field practitioners alike.

Another aspect of human services is the use of the 'indigenous workers' who share the subculture of the target groups, and therefore can be more effective in helping clients. Similarly, human services utilises the efforts of volunteers, or as Mehr (1988) coins it 'parahelpers', those not formally engaged for pay in the helping process.

The human services literature suggests that graduates emerging from courses such as the Edith Cowan award should be called 'entry-level professionals'. In contrast, many workers in a lot of the local agencies have been around for so long that their career paths have preceded the contemporary drives towards certification, and education within the human services work-

force. The issue of 'credentialism' arises, and while training and qualification in human services education is presumably a 'good thing', the question emerges as to whether Australia is heading towards an obsessive concern with 'paper qualifications' (Slattery, 1993). One can foresee that at some time in the future the minimum requirement for running one of these little community-based organisations will be a Master degree! Whether such a scenario amounts to appropriate preparation or excessive credentialism remains open to question.

Reviewing human service workers, then, the field shows an uneasy balance between the history of 'amateur' helping and the rising concern with qualification and certification. This tension will continue as educational institutions expand their formal 'human service' course offerings. The human service workers are sensitised to the role of personal, professional, and organisational values in the helping process, within the context of core values such as client 'self-determination'. Human service work provides various intrinsic motivations, meeting people, helping others, reforming society, and so forth, which suggest that daily work can enhance self-fulfilment and continuing personal growth.

## SECTION 4: TARGET GROUPS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Human service workers address their professional attention to assisting individuals who derive from a range of social welfare target groups, those at whom intervention is 'aimed'. Debates exist about the use of terminology to describe the 'clients' or 'consumers' of human services. For instance, the term 'consumer' may imply a commercial aspect while the category 'client' has overtones of dependency. Probably no perfect term exists, though Woodside and McClam utilise the concept of 'client' throughout their text. Similarly Norman (1988, pp.85-86) argues for the term 'client':

*The most frequently used term in human services for those who receive services is client. It connotes a relationship of dependence on the case manager in relation to professional knowledge and access to resources but generally has no negative connotation. The term consumer of services is used where development of increased client independence is the major service goal as in independent living programs. It connotes a more egalitarian relationship...*

The literature suggests that human problems arise according to three main themes, these being problems of a 'developmental and situational' nature, those of meeting 'hierarchical needs', and those emerging due to 'societal change' (Woodside and McClam, 1990). Each one of us as an individual necessarily deals with the fairly predictable developmental changes and problems arising out of the maturational and ageing processes of the human life cycle. Some problems of course, cannot be anticipated, and these 'situational' problems carry an element of being arbitrary, surprising, and unpredictable in nature. Yet other problems emerge from the difficulty of meeting the 'hierarchical' needs of the individual, the notion — following Maslow — that after meeting certain basic requirements human protagonists each attempt to clamber towards the 'self-actualised' peak of the psychological pyramid. Further problems for individuals are generated through change in society. An example of such societal change is the current national level of unemployment, caused through economic restructuring and governmental inattention, but creating severe problems of living for individuals in terms of access to resources and opportunities (Reid, 1993; Beckerling, 1993).

Interestingly, there is by no means a 'fixed agenda' of social problems, but the contemporary 'agenda' emerges out of the existence and visibility of various social issues, the advocacy efforts of welfare lobby groups, media attention, and the political arena (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). In any pre-election year, for example, the politicians all become highly concerned about the problems experienced by disadvantaged sectors of society, and the sincerity of such concern is most intense in marginal electoral seats! So out of this competitive intellectual and publicity arena a few social issues seem to gain attention as the dominant 'social problems' of the day.

The corollary of this situation is, of course, the existence of 'hidden' social problems that for whatever reason do not gain media attention, provoke academic debate, or generate public interest. For example, an emergent social problem — at least in terms of these perceptions — is that of 'elder abuse'. Though books were published in America on elder abuse since the turn of the eighties, and though there is even an overseas academic journal (*Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*) on this very topic, the subject only began to gain much attention in Australia in 1992, with seminars, research, and publicity (Kingsley, 1992; Eccleston, 1992; McKimmie, 1992; Green, 1993; McAsey, 1993). Such questions arise about the very existence, incidence, and recognition of any particular 'social problem'.

Human service workers address a range of problems within their client and target groups, including everything from individual distress through to social poverty. In terms of working with individual clients, human service workers often draw upon an Eriksonian view of the life cycle of humankind. In Erikson's theoretical formulation of 'epigenetic' development, over the life cycle humans pass through some eight stages of growth and development, with each stage needing successful resolution for constructive adaptation (Erikson, 1977). These individual human service clients, then, may be suffering from problems related to their point in chronological development, or problems with activity, or else problems related to personal adjustment. Sometimes, in the case of 'involuntary' clients, there may be strong resistance to the helping efforts of the worker. This suggests that the more 'peaceful' jobs in the human services industry are those which serve 'voluntary' clients who may be more grateful and gracious about the intervention. In any case, in assisting clients the human service worker could be said to be concerned with enhancing the 'problem-solving' capacities of the client, and also oriented to preventive initiatives, as reflected in the cover of the journal entitled *Prevention in Human Services*.

In review of clients, then, the human service worker assists such consumers from a range of social groups in dealing with a great variety of problems. Some clients have problems related to individual adjustment, while other problems for individuals are generated through societal change. Interestingly, the public 'agenda' of social problems is subject to fashion, and emerges out of the turmoil of competing interest groups, media activity, and social and political debate. In general, human service workers seek to 'empower' their clients and consumer groups, through identifying and strengthening their 'problem-solving' capacities.

## SECTION 5: MODELS AND THEORIES IN HUMAN SERVICES

In human services, as in the wider world, as in daily life, human beings negotiate reality through reference to implicit — and sometimes explicit — ‘models’ and ‘theories’. In this general sense, theories are provisional approximations of reality, subject to expansion, revision, and rejection. In the specific sense of human services, theories are conceptualisations of practice wisdom. So as human beings we try to grasp ‘reality’, and we keep trying, and we never quite get it, so then we try some more! Humans never achieve complete comprehension of reality, any reality. Considering ‘theory’ in this broad sense, the literature shows that even in the ‘hard’ sciences theory is still constructed in an ‘artistic’ and ‘subjective’ way (Kuhn, 1970; Horgan, 1991). An interesting and amusing example of the possible divorce between theory — in this case theological theory — and reality was shown when towards the middle of 1992 a Korean fundamentalist Christian sect announced that the End of the World would occur on the 28th of October of that year (Doomsday mass suicide fear, 1992). So the important point is that as human beings we are quite capable of perceiving reality in ways which suit our personal or ideological perspectives. Furthermore, such paradigmatic rivalries are also emotively charged (Haworth, 1991). Therefore, theories are important in human services in terms of the perception of social reality and the subsequent human services intervention.

Another aspect of the ‘mental life’ of human service organisations is the role of ‘ideology’. The term ‘ideology’ can be taken in two different ways, as the ‘science of ideas’, or more usually in the literature as ‘doctrine’ or ‘dogma’. Thus Pinker (1982, p.18) contrasts ideology with theory:

*Theories are highly summarised versions of reality to begin with, and, when they are shielded from full exposure to the evidence of the social world, they become ideologies.*

Most organisations demonstrate some sort of official orthodoxy — if not ideology — a ‘conventional wisdom’ about how things should be done.

An example of theory and ideology is that of ‘community care’ in Australia. A decade ago the author was studying at the (then) Social Welfare Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and people there at the time began rushing around, and flashing the bright yellow-covered McLeay Report (1982), and saying: ‘Oh, this is important, this is exciting!’ Ten years ago, for a government report to emerge saying that too many frail aged persons were in residential care, and to argue that community services should be established and expanded to prevent such premature or unnecessary institutionalisation, this was brand new social theory and social policy. Nowadays, this is simply the conventional gerontological wisdom and practice. Indeed, provisions seem to have gone to an opposite extreme, where folk that might really need aged residential care cannot obtain it, due in part to the new ‘ideology’ of community care which wants to keep all people out of institutions.

Woodside and McClam (1990) suggest that there are three main models of helping, these being the 'medical' model, the 'public health' model, and then the 'human service' model. The medical model assumes that individual problems are based in 'sickness', so it follows that the client must be diagnosed, prescribed, and treated. In contrast, the public health model — more sociological and educational in its emphases — suggests that the environment in which individuals face common problems may need reform or restructuring. Then there is the human service model, which views individuals as experiencing problems in living, and utilises 'problem-solving' as a working methodology and a goal for consumers. Thus human service workers employ a problem-solving methodology as they enhance the problem-solving capacities of their clients.

This problem-solving method also flows on to the use of 'peer therapy' and 'mutual self-help', where we are considering groups of clients. Peer therapy uses people of the same or similar subculture, or class, or category to assist folk to address common problems of living. Mutual self-help uses group processes to help individuals solve their own problems and to advocate on behalf of target groups. Self-help has a 'duality' to it, though. On the one hand, mutual self-help is a 'good thing' in that clients get together, get motivated, and help each other and empower themselves. On the other hand, the existence of self-help groups can allow governments to redirect their responsibilities towards disadvantaged groups by saying: 'Oh, you go away and help yourselves!'

In thinking about social theory, it seems that we can only approximate reality in our theoretical explanations of it. However, the perception of people and problems shapes human service intervention and action. The human services intellectual arena is subject to fads and fashions, similar to the wider society, but the responsibility of teachers and practitioners in human services is to establish models of theoretical and practical utility, models that describe reality realistically and assist effective intervention. The human services model, then, utilises a 'problem-solving' methodology to assist clients and reform society.

## SECTION 6: HELPING THERAPIES

Human service workers exploit a problem-solving technique to help clients address their problems. However, there are debates as to whether workers can claim to indulge in 'therapy'. The term 'therapy' it seems has a precise clinical usage, but also may suggest a broad interactional approach to problems. Interestingly, with the professionalisation of human services, what used to be just helping behaviour now tends more and more to be classified as 'therapy'. For example, playing music to help nursing home residents is nowadays called 'music therapy', while helping clients gain reading materials is labelled 'bibliotherapy'. Olley (cited in Wiles, 1988) debunks this approach by asserting that all that many clients need is a 'shoulder to cry on', a 'sympathetic listener', and coins the notion of 'cup of tea therapy'! Nevertheless, it is important for human service workers to have some sense of the theoretical variety of the psychotherapies, in terms of the history of helping and awareness of appropriate referral of clients to psychological services.

Though Freud is now part of western intellectual and cultural history, debates continue about the helping theories and therapies arising out of this tradition (for example, Schatzman, 1992; Fullinwider, 1992). For the purposes of human service workers it is important to note the six common assumptions of the psychotherapies, as explicated by Mehr (1988). First, it is suggested that the emergence of problems relates to the personality of the individual. Second, the source of these problems is seen as internal to the personality, rather than being environmental in nature. Third, the past biography of the subject has a strong influence on present perceptions and behaviour. Fourth, there is the psychological notion of 'overdetermination', that behaviour becomes entrenched over time so that, for instance, New Year resolutions are notoriously difficult to keep. Fifth, there is the notion that there is an optimum personality structure within each one of us, a 'butterfly' waiting to be released. Sixth, human beings are always capable of psychological growth and development throughout the life cycle.

While human service workers do not intervene directly as clinical 'therapists', they need to be aware that there are psychological 'fashions' in the psychotherapies, in a similar way to the fluid agenda of social problems. The range of therapies includes Rogerianism, Transactional Analysis, Gestalt, Reality, and Rational Emotive Therapies. So the selection of the intervention will be influenced by the intellectual or practice trends of the day, as well as the psychological predisposition of the therapist.

Around the field agencies of Perth, though, many of Carl Rogers' ideas have been absorbed into the professional ethos of how helping should be done (Rogers, 1976). From Rogers derives the concept of client-centred therapy, the notion of non-directive counselling, the value of non-judgmentalism, the idea of 'holding up a mirror' to help clients perceive their situations and options



more clearly, the scope for personality reorganisation, along with the incorporation of new adaptive skills.

In helping, human service workers draw upon the Freudian tradition in terms of western intellectual heritage and sensitivity to appropriate client referral. The psychotherapies — being individualistic, intensive, and expensive — deal with the deeper aspects of client malaise, and are different in scope from the more immediate and short-term character of human service intervention. Philosophies of intervention are subject to fashion, as well as ongoing theoretical and empirical development, and a veritable supermarket of therapies exists to suit practice requirements. Across most human service agencies the general Rogerian contribution can be detected in the service ideals of non-judgmentalism and client-centred intervention.

## SECTION 7: CRISIS INTERVENTION

Human service workers often assist clients through 'crisis' situations. Indeed Kim (1992) asserts that as the human services field expands the general thrust is towards 'counselling and face-to-face intervention'. It is crises that usually propel clients through the human service agency doorway.

It is interesting to observe that objective situations or 'problems' and subjective responses to those situations are quite different from each other. It is the emotional response to a situation that actually causes the sense of 'stress' or 'crisis'. Further, there is a distinction to be made between two types of crises, these being the 'developmental' and the 'situational' forms of crisis (Woodside and McClam, 1990). Developmental crises are those transitions that each one of us as an individual predictably must face in the course of the unique odyssey through the human life cycle, growing up, getting an education, getting a job, getting a spouse, raising children, retiring from paid employment, and so on. Situational crises, in contrast, cannot be foreseen, with examples including sudden bereavement or natural disaster. Bushfires provide a dramatic Australian example.

The 'crisis intervention' work seeks to identify and to enhance the problem-solving strengths and skills of the distressed client. It is important to remember that people are 'survivors', and indeed each one of us is a survivor, so the human services strategy is to latch onto the competencies and capacities that have served well in the past. Thus the 'problem-solving' aspect of human service work, previously noted, applies strongly to crisis intervention theory and practice.

Crises generally have a number of common characteristics. These situations are beyond the established coping capacities of the individual. Those suffering a crisis generally find that their 'sense' of personal 'control' over life declines, the sense of pain or distress or anxiety increases, the sense of social support may diminish, and there may be some type of avoidance behaviour to escape the difficult situation altogether. So individuals in crisis are essentially experiencing a state of psychological disequilibrium, in situations beyond those that they have transcended previously in life.

Crises, though, can be resolved in positive and adaptive ways, so the crisis intervention worker seeks to facilitate a positive, creative resolution of the crisis, so that the client emerges from the trauma as a better, stronger person. Insofar as human service crisis intervention is concerned, we are generally talking about short-term intensive intervention, and the view in the literature is that the period of client susceptibility to influence runs for about six weeks. More entrenched problems suggest either referral for deeper psychological counselling, or else human services case management (Weil, Karls, and Associates, 1988; Applebaum and Austin, 1990; Meredith, Stephen, and Joshi, 1990; Moxley, 1990).

In crisis intervention, then, the human service worker must assist the client towards an adaptive transcendence of the problem situation. Thus the problem-solving methodology applies to both client and worker. In a crisis situation the individual feels less 'in control' of life than usual, and more 'anxious' about the situation, leading to personal and social disequilibrium. Predictable 'developmental' crises and arbitrary 'situational' crises alike tax the coping capacities of the protagonist beyond established boundaries. Thus the subjective meaning of any 'crisis' needs to be distinguished from its objective reality. The worker needs to combine sensitivity to the consumer and empathy with their life passages and contingencies in a short-term intervention program.

## SECTION 8: COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

In contrast to the notion of individual crisis intervention explored above, there is the process of 'community intervention'. There are in existence many advocacy groups, that seek to reform society on behalf of their nominated target groups. Similarly, some local government authorities employ workers known as 'Community Development Managers'. So here is a concept of 'prevention', of reforming the social system, so that the number of persons seeking individual crisis intervention could be reduced.

Mehr (1988) distinguishes between 'limited social intervention' and 'comprehensive social intervention', and suggests that human services includes both types of work. Limited social intervention would be at the level of 'group work', where problem-solving capacities of clients could be developed through the affirmative group processes. Comprehensive social intervention is rather more ambitious, including consumer advocacy, mobilisation, and empowerment. Mehr has a sweeping vision, for instance, he suggests optimistically that the problem of 'poverty' could and should be tackled within the context of comprehensive social intervention.

Human service workers are likely to be recruited into advocacy groups, where they make professional contributions in such areas as submission writing, political representation, research projects, or community development programs. Advocacy groups — on behalf of whatever target groups — seek to represent the disempowered, alter the distribution of resources, facilitate mobilisation and unity of the target group.

As already noted, the social problem of poverty is part of the reform agenda of human service, and the Henderson Poverty Inquiry (1975) documented that seniors constitute a significant social group living in a state of poverty. The recent Social Security Review and its examination of retirement incomes policy for the twenty-first century provides some insight into the process of community intervention. Late in 1988, when all the Ageing Advocacy Groups were about to go into summer recess, the Federal Government released its report on retirement incomes policy (Foster, 1988) with the invitation for interested individuals and parties to make submissions as to what should be done on this social policy issue. As a result the local Council on the Ageing — the peak 'ageing' body — contributed to hearings on the matter as well as forwarding its views to (then) Minister Howe (Walker, Wiles, Wilson, and Zilko, 1989; Wiles, 1989). When the August 1989 Federal Budget was announced, the Government had — in the main — adopted most of the suggestions of the various social welfare lobby groups, at least in the short term. However, in review it appears that with regard to social justice considerations retirement incomes policy has been regressing ever since that time (Wiles, 1992).

In reviewing community intervention, the professional concept is to fix community problems so as to prevent the emergence of individual cases of dis-

ness. Human service workers are often involved within advocacy groups, which seek to fight for, mobilise, and empower their client populations. Human services hopes to ameliorate societal problems at the level of group work (limited social intervention) and at the level of 'social engineering' (comprehensive social intervention). Thus human services deals with the range of problems from individual counselling through to widespread social reformism, as for example, in seeking a solution to the perennial problem of poverty.

## SECTION 9: THE FUTURE FOR AUSTRALIAN HUMAN SERVICES

Futurology is a difficult 'science', but it is clear that the future of human services in this country will grow out of its present realities. Those realities have been explored in this paper in terms of four main themes of human services, its 'context', its 'players', its 'models', and its 'interventions'.

First, human services was seen in view of its 'definition' and 'history'. The 'definition' of human services is not easy, as it is only a few years since the term has begun to be used at all widely in Australia. Such definition emerges out of educational and agency auspices. In Western Australia, the Edith Cowan University has only begun recently to label its course clearly as 'human services', while in employment advertisements local agencies have started to use the term more frequently. In regard to its intellectual origins, human services is a North American import, which could possibly be considered as a form of cultural imperialism. While the relevance and utility of American culture and concepts being applied to Australia may be questioned, the protagonists of human services see it as a new and emerging 'profession', addressing needs neglected by more traditional helping professions. So the definition of Australian human services will be an ongoing development into the twenty-first century.

Reflection on the past assists speculation about future societal trends. In noting the 'history' of Australian human services, a mix of general western background and specifically Australian context was observed.

Across the centuries, and amongst the range of countries and cultures, there have always been some idealistic social reformers and interpersonal helpers seeking to ameliorate the plight of those in pain or poverty. In the west the philanthropical and charity worker provided prototypes for modern social work, community development, and human services.

In Australia in earlier times, the 'social laboratory' metaphor expressed the social idealism that in this new country, blessed with fine climate and abounding in natural resources, far from the politics and pollution and class struggles of the old European order, a progressive political culture of redistribution and egalitarianism would provide a 'fair go' for every citizen to enjoy the good things of life. This idealism and egalitarianism was illustrated in the design and delivery of an Age Pension in 1909, early in comparative international terms. Australia, though, failed to deliver its initial social policy promise as shown in the 1975 Henderson Poverty Inquiry which found that many sectors of Australian citizens were not included in the 'lucky country'.

Since the start of the 1980s there has been a general international 'retreat' away from the principles and philosophies of the Welfare State. For example, during much of this decade in Australia the Social Security Review had examined the range of its beneficiaries with a view to effective provision, and

with an eye to tighter targeting. Similarly, the shift in retirement incomes policy over the last five years has been depressing for the policy gerontologist. While Aged Income Security was one of the first programs of the early Australian welfare state, the Social Security Review has reversed the onus of provision back onto the 'individual', a policy reversal over ninety years. So the human services enterprise is seeking to be established during the dismantling of much of the existing Australian welfare state.

Second, human services has been considered, within this paper, according to its 'players' or participants, its workers and clients. Insofar as 'human service workers' are concerned, a tension appears within the literature between praising the amateurism and voluntarism of early workers, yet exhorting the growth and development of professionalism. The inexorable trend, particularly as Australian educational institutions begin to produce cohorts of 'human services' graduates, is towards increasing professionalism.

Having established 'generalist' human service work as an occupation, and then as an emerging profession, the next trend seems to be towards ongoing 'specialisation'. Does this suggest that as human services moves onward and upward — improving its professional status, prestige, and perks — yet another occupational vacuum may occur as human service workers become too expensive and too specialised to perform certain tasks such as helping the 'underclass'?

At any rate, those working within human services at present are often intrinsically motivated to help others and reform society, which is just as well since the human services industry — at least for the front-line service providers — is relatively poorly paid in terms of Australia's occupational hierarchy. Fortunately the intrinsic motivations of working with people include the potential for ongoing personal and professional development. Human service education, hopefully, equips the entry-level graduates with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary for critical and creative practice.

The 'clients' of human services derive mainly from the 'underclass', those outside the social mainstream. Such clients experience problems across a broad range, from difficulties of individual adjustment through to those arising from economic and social dislocation. Interestingly, the 'agenda' of social problems is highly fluid, and develops out of variables such as advocacy activities, media portrayals, the state of the social conscience, as well as the objective difficulties faced by particular social welfare target groups. These agendas change, and just as juvenile car thieves were a highly visible social problem in 1991, so in the following year the issue of elder abuse emerged 'out of nowhere' to become perceived as a pressing social problem. Human services intervention with clients seeks to enhance their extant problem-solving capacities and skills. The concept is to assist clients and target groups towards 'empowerment'.

Third, human services has been considered according to its mental 'models' of reality, its theories and therapies through which it seeks to deliver programs and assist clients. In terms of 'theories' it is clear that our ongoing at-

tempts to define 'reality' lead to a series of theories which only ever approximate it. In human services, as helping clients is the stated purpose, theory development provides not only intrinsic intellectual challenge but also contains a practical or utilitarian dimension, that of promoting effective and efficient service provision. In general intellectual life as in the specific helping professions, models and theories are subject to philosophical popularity and fashion, particularly as organisations may adopt any particular model as a received version of reality. The border between ideology and theory is easily crossed, but then working life in the human services does not generally allow for a great amount of time for personal theoretical speculation either! The literature seems to suggest that inasmuch as there can be any one overarching theoretical paradigm across the human services, it is the 'problem-solving' methodology that applies across the diversity of its client groups and social institutions.

The 'therapies' used by human services similarly demonstrate a variety of approaches. Like its general western intellectual background, human services draws upon the Freudian legacy in conceptualising problems of individuals, of looking out for subconscious motivations to human behaviour. However, human services is much more concerned with immediate and short-term interventions to solve direct, often dramatic, problems. Nevertheless, the generalist human service worker will draw upon the various products of the 'therapy supermarket', so as to find the method and approach that may suit any particular client or client group. In general though, the Rogerian ethos of client-centred, non-judgmentalism almost appears as an implicit orthodoxy within human service helping across the field agencies nowadays.

Fourth, the human services enterprise has been reviewed according to its 'interventions'. Such intervention includes a broad range from face-to-face helping of the client suffering a crisis situation through to long-term advocacy in pursuit of widespread social reform. In regard to 'crisis intervention' the human service worker supports the innate problem-solving capacities of the client, and seeks to expand such strengths and skills. It is the subjective perception — as distinct from objective reality — of problem situations that causes them to be interpreted in 'crisis' terms, so the worker assists the client towards clarity of perception as to the problem itself, as well as the possible range of coping strategies and options. Crisis intervention, essentially a short-term therapy, helps the client to return to a state of psychological equilibrium, hopefully equipped with additional coping capacities acquired through transcendence of the situation.

While crisis intervention is not restricted to human services operations — indeed its literature is drawn from psychology and social work — human services also includes the concept of 'community intervention' or 'comprehensive social intervention', the reform of social structures so as to reduce the generation of individual crisis situations. In this way human



services seeks to diminish the incidence and intensity of difficulties experienced by individuals. Thus 'preventive' social policies and human services may use resources more efficiently than providing a myriad of personal cures. In this

manner human services work often involves the creation and development of advocacy groups to protect disadvantaged citizens and to agitate for social reform. In this way clients and client groups may be empowered to take their proper place in society and polity. However, given the entrenched nature of the social problem of poverty, the human services enterprise has a big task ahead of it!

In summary, then, this paper has explored Australian human services, and suggests that the definition of human services is essentially problematical and in need of ongoing conceptual and operational refinement. In terms of the application of human services in Australia, the historical context is one of early social egalitarianism and promising policy beginnings, marred by the continuing decline of the Welfare State. Human service workers constitute a cadre of intrinsically motivated helpers, yet human services is turning rapidly into an emerging profession. The workers assist clients, generally derived from the 'underclass', to enhance their innate problem-solving capacities and life skills. Working within the human service organisations, the human services enterprise develops and discards practice models and theories in relation to needs, politics, and fashions of the day. While agency life draws upon the Freudian heritage, helping in human services is immediate and practical, rather than extended and psychoanalytical, in its scope. Much human service work involves crisis intervention, short-term therapy to assist the client to regain equilibrium after personal trauma. Nevertheless, the human services enterprise is sweeping in its ideals, and includes the sanguine notion of preventive social engineering.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE

### LEARNING DIFFICULTIES PROJECT

#### EDDYSTONE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Sheelagh. Sheelagh is the Special Ed teacher. She has been with the unit since it opened in 1989. She taught year ones in N.S.W. for seven years.

1. ***What are your perceptions of the level of literacy, in particular reading competency, in the class that you taught last year (or this year).***

I have about 10 students at a time. They are the ones who can't cope in normal classrooms. A criteria for me taking them is that they test below IQ 70. I can take a few on special placement who don't have a low IQ, but the unit is not supposed to be used for behaviour problems. However I often think bad behaviour stops them learning, so sometimes it helps to come to me. I would like to see the children leave school with a functional level of reading (about year 4).

2. ***If some children showed weaknesses in this area, what sort of problems were they?***

One of the main problems is comprehension. They also may have trouble with phonics. I think for many there is a real gap between understanding and reading. Many can read and spell but have no idea what they mean.

3. ***How did these problems manifest themselves in the classroom?***

Following directions is very difficult for children with literacy problems as many won't understand what is expected of them. I do a lot of oral language skills, they need to use these skills as much as possible. They are very easily distracted. It is hard to say if these problems are the cause of bad behaviour, but the children seem to want a reaction. The children I see late are the worst. They have been in a system for sometime that has accepted their negative behaviour.

4. ***What do you think are some of the reasons for these problems?***

***Prompt: Family related reasons, community related, perspectives of school on policy on reading, reading methodology.***

It goes back to general ability level. They can learn there is no reason why not. Some are very inhibited and can't pick up social cues. I instil in them that we all learn from making mistakes. In any class there will always be some children who experience difficulties. You must have extra support for these children. I believe that if you find challenging things for them to do which are at their level you will not necessarily have naughty behaviour.

The ones I worry about most are the ones who are quiet. I remember a young girl last year in year 5. It took until then for her to be referred to my unit. If she had been a difficult child she would have been given support a long time before then.

I use a direct instruction method which is very good because there is repetition. I think it is in whole of language methods that the weaker child misses out. The brighter ones thrive but the others need more structure. Weaker children need basic skills and strategies instilled into them, and they need to understand phonics. When I first started teaching in Sydney they were learning the "whole word" method, but this wasn't good for weaker children.

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **LEARNING DIFFICULTIES PROJECT**

#### **EDDYSTONE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Sue Year 3** - Sue is a two year trained teacher and works as part of a tandem. She has been at the school for four years and has taught years 1-3. Last year she taught year 1.

**1. *What are your perceptions of the level of literacy, in particular reading competency, in the class that you taught last year (or this year).***

Last year I had a mixed class with a huge span in ability. Some started school reading and writing and by the end of the year some had just started to sound out words. They were a reasonably big group and I would say about 10 were outstanding and the rest not so good. I am very happy with whole of language methods but I push phonics.

I have some of my year ones this year in year 3. They are generally still very weak. They don't have a good grasp of word building. They are writing a lot but phonics standards are still low. They are still not competent in using for example *sh*, *ch*, and *th*. It is still a bit early to really tell the reading competency but my first feeling is that they are very low on comprehension. I suppose I have the bottom 2/3rds of year 3 and about 10 of my class of 30 are very poor.

**2. *If some children showed weaknesses in this area, what sort of problems were they?***

I found the biggest problem was their reluctance to put pen to paper. They needed prompting all the time and were not willing to even attempt it. I suppose at the end of the year most were having a go. A couple were not reading at all individually. Some were not connecting symbols to sounds. Even at the end of the year many didn't know symbols.

**3. *How did these problems manifest themselves in the classroom?***

These problems often lead to a lack of self esteem. It was hard for the weak children watching other competent children. I don't think that literacy is a problem in year 1 though. It is only if these problems are carried through to higher grades that there are real problems. I find it is easier to build their confidence in other ways in year 1.

4. ***What do you think are some of the reasons for these problems?  
Prompt: Family related reasons, community related, perspectives of school on policy on reading, reading methodology.***

I think that they are very often family related. There are a lot of children who get no support at home and get most of their information from T.V. Their lack of life experiences is a real problem. I think most of the problems kids experience in learning relates to their family life.

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