

PRESENTATION TO STAFF
June 10, 2008

Before getting to the main business of the afternoon, I would like to thank those of you who were able to attend our recent tenth and twentieth anniversaries for three of our colleagues. In them we have forty or more years of experience in the delivery of social services. It is worth reflecting on the total number of clients they would have seen over those years and the difference they would have undoubtedly made to the lives of so many people.

When we then think of each one of us and the daily contribution we make to the delivery of social services you can't help but be amazed by the impact that that composite effort is having on the community in which we live and the broader human society. As we go through our daily routine and become immersed in the demands of each day, there is often little time to reflect on the values and motivations that lead us to work in the area of social welfare. It is equally difficult to appreciate the positive contribution that we are making to our social fabric.

I hope that these words are not taken as mere platitudes. It is so easy to underplay the significance of what we do. Our familiarity with our work and our fellow workers can sometimes blind us to the special nature of both. The great majority of people who work in the social service sector do so because they want to assist others and make a constructive contribution to the world they live in. I know that so many of you are here for that reason. Whether you are providing clinical or administrative services you all have one thing in common and that is that you are willing to use your abilities for the good of others. I have heard Centrecare people say this so often over the years.

To believe in the importance of another's welfare is not easy in today's world. There is so much concern for individual wellbeing and personal gain that interest in the common good has become a dim light struggling to be seen in the glare of self interest. Social service work, especially in the non-profit sector, is not just a career but also a vocation. It is a calling to do something out of the ordinary and even to do things that are extraordinary. It is an inclination to self abandonment founded on a strong belief in the intrinsic worth and dignity of each fellow human being; a dignity that exists irrespective of their capacities or circumstances. Such a vocation is a very special gift that we take too often for granted.

Our work allows us to share people's pain and also their joys. It allows us to see and touch their vulnerabilities and provides us with opportunities to offer a helping hand and a healing word. There are also occasions when we see the immense relief and joy that comes from the support we have given. Such intimacy is rare in human relationships. It is even rarer between people of short acquaintance. Many of you have spoken of what a privilege it is to experience such a relationship with your clients. Our work can also be very demanding and frustrating when we see the loss of human potential and unnecessary suffering. However, these moments ought not to overshadow the importance and inherent beauty of the work we do.

Together we respond to the needs of people who are homeless, refugee individual and families, youth in distress, children in need of refuge, migrants

struggling with red tape, gamblers experiencing difficulties with their habit, people with personal and relationship problems, parents and their adolescents, women dealing with post abortion issues, women and men facing the scourge of domestic violence, children in need of support and counselling, former prisoners and parents struggling with their very young children. We provide education on matters relating to drug and alcohol, domestic violence, clinical expertise and corporate wellbeing. The list is far lengthier than this.

In all we provide over 80 individual social service programs over a large part of this State and even interstate. We know all this but we often don't get a chance to reflect on what all this effort means. What does our work mean for us both individually and collectively? No doubt the answer to this question is different for each of us but as you reflect on this allow yourself to acknowledge the importance of the contribution you make to the wellbeing of so many people.

The importance of this contribution is often not recognised. The community in which we live, although supportive of the work that charitable organisations like Centrecare undertake, does not understand them nor does it appreciate their complexity or how essential they are to societal wellbeing. Most people, including many of our political leaders, believe that such organisations are filled with well meaning people who do their best to provide help to others. Few appreciate the difficulties of the work, the competencies and professionalism required to do it and the complexity of the political and organisational environment within which they operate.

This lack of understanding means that organisations like Centrecare and peak bodies such as WACOSS and ACOSS are regularly at pains to communicate with government and the broader community about the needs of the social service sector. These efforts have over the years been partially successful in bringing about a better appreciation of the important role that non-profit organisations play in the provision of essential community services. However, this task is far from over.

The workforce issues facing non-profit organisations are a case in point. After much representation from a variety of bodies a government sponsored study has been undertaken on the present and future workforce needs facing the non-profit, social service sector. The outcome of this study, by the community services Roundtable, is yet to be finalised but it is expected to be available soon. In the interim, non-profit organisations continue to have to deal with very real concerns such as a shrinking workforce, the widening gap between pays in the public service and our sector and the ever spiralling costs associated with a booming economy. These concerns are not simply about the sustainability of individual organisations but also about the long term capacity of the West Australian community to deliver quality welfare services.

Earlier this year, Uniting Care West and Centrecare invited a group of CEOs from non-profit organisations to come together to discuss the question of salaries and conditions within our sector. The response was extraordinary

with over 30 CEOs being willing to participate in the discussion. They were also willing to contribute financially to the development of a campaign that sought to communicate to government the difficulties being faced by non-profits. A central aspect of this communication is the issue of salaries and conditions for workers in our sector. Appropriate wages and conditions are important in ensuring not only that workers are properly rewarded but also that appropriately skilled people remain involved in this important work.

Making substantial inroads into the issue of pay and conditions for people working in non-profit organisations relies heavily on convincing government that funding contracts for such services need to be significantly increased. Without such increases individual organisations cannot bring about the degree of improvement that is needed. Persuading government to spend more money on social services, especially in the non-profit sector, is not an easy task. The difficulty associated with accomplishing such a result cannot be underestimated. However, the CEO's campaign is committed to achieving such an outcome.

Centrecare has been aware that the work of the Roundtable on workforce matters and the CEOs campaign would not provide immediate relief to you, our staff. Consequently, a great deal of time and thought has been spent in the past months determining how Centrecare could improve pay and conditions while at the same time ensuring its long term sustainability.

It must also be said that the increases being provided can only be achieved by Centrecare reducing its overall expenditure. The agency believes that these savings can be made. They will be an important aspect of budget discussions in the weeks ahead.

Centrecare has always attempted to provide a flexible and supportive workplace. This will be further reinforced by the introduction of significant changes in its leave and other benefits to staff. In reality, some of the changes will place Centrecare at the forefront of employee conditions whether in the for-profit or not-for-profit sectors. These will be detailed shortly.

Additionally, the agency is instituting a number of initiatives to improve our work environment some of these are in response to the staff survey carried out last year and some are in addition to these. The agency's response to matters raised through the survey has been presented to each branch and these responses are being systematically implemented.

Centrecare has a reputation for being a highly professional organisation and is well known for the quality of its services. This striving towards the provision of excellent services will continue to be a mainstay of our organisation. We appreciate that with the turnover in employees that is occurring across all organisations, the average is 26%, that there is a greater need for the ongoing support and development of staff.

To this end, Centrecare has reviewed aspects of its Centrecare Corporate arm so that more time can be dedicated to the area of professional

excellence. Much thought and collaboration has gone into the development of this role. Consequently, there will be an increased investment in the professional excellence portfolio to enhance:

- The professional supervision model
- Professional development - internal and external training programs
- Employee wellbeing and EAP coordination

Changes in this area will encompass:

- The formation of a Clinical Leadership Team (CLT) within Centrecare (Application information to be circulated in the coming weeks);
- CLT will form the basis for a completely revised clinical supervision model within Centrecare;
- CLT will have intensive, ongoing development and support for its role;
- There will be a greater focus on ethics, best practice and innovation. This will be site specific to meet the increasingly diverse needs and skills of staff and clients.

Centrecare will also be seeking to establish a formal mechanism through which staff or others can undertake the research and development of ideas, professional practice and service models. Such a development will require a great deal of detailed work but it will eventually be an important part of Centrecare's ongoing commitment to service excellence.

Centrecare has always had a strong commitment to robust governance systems. It has traditionally enjoyed a very stable and very effective Board and management team. The sustained development of the organisation over many years and its ongoing reputation as a leader in the WA social service sector attests to this. However, the complexity and demands of the current environment necessarily means that Centrecare's governing structures also need to be supported and developed. Consequently, we will ensure that along with clinical skills, the governance and administrative aspects of the organisation continue to receive the development and attention that they require.

Our agency will continue to strive to be an organisation that is:

- A highly caring and professional presence in our community;
- Committed to professional excellence;
- Dedicated to providing clients with the best possible service;
- Enthusiastic about the care and development of its staff;
- Determined to have effective governance and management practices;
- Unwavering in its contribution to the development of appropriate government policy and programs;
- Passionate about the achievement of a fair and just society.

No group or organisation is perfect and we all make mistakes but what is important is the spirit that motivates our thoughts and our actions and how this is expressed.