

Stories of working with community in Western Australia



Transcript

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Helen Creed, pictured at the Miscellaneous Worker's Union, 4th May 2004

DP Here we are at The Miscellaneous Workers Union?

HC That's right.

DP And Helen Creed has agreed to let us come here and talk to her about community development. Thank you very much for the chance.

HC A pleasure.

DP Can I ask you to begin by telling us about your early involvement in community development?

HC Well my qualifications are as a social worker and I think I was fortunate to be doing social work in the early seventies at Melbourne Uni at the time when the Women's Movement was in the sort of second phase of feminism. So not only was I in-



involved in a sense in the social work course, but a lot of the activities I was involved in outside of that were to do with the Women's Movement and that is where I think there were a lot of very good tactics and strategies in the women's movement. I'm very conscious of the

fact that often feminists are seen as having no sense of humour but some of the tactics we got up to clearly put a lie to that. But also, I go back to when I am asked about some of the campaigns that the union has been involved in, go back to that time and say, "Well that is where I learnt some of the things that I now do." And they were things, I mean they were serious campaigns like abortion and equal pay but they were also campaigns like women not being permitted to drink in public bars and so there was some innovative kind of tactics used and, you know, people all going to drink at one particular pub to get thrown out and all that sort of stuff.

So I guess from my point of view while I was doing social work I was actually involved in a range of women's movement sort of stuff at that time. I mean in the late sixties it was really the Vietnam War stuff and I kind of missed that and was involved in the Women's Movement.

A couple of the placements that I had, in those days we did four placements, the final placement I did was at the Brotherhood of St Laurence so that was a pretty significant placement and the third placement was actually at a mental health clinic and that is where I in fact got my first job. So I was offered a job in the clinic and this was a, this was in inner city Melbourne, the Clarendon Clinic was based in East Melbourne but it was responsible for Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond which are very inner city Melbourne. And me, as the idealistic social worker, rock up and discover, "Horror, horror, that not one person spoke another language on the staff." So I went down to the Richmond Community Education Centre, enrolled myself in Greek and lasted one session and thought, "Mmm

maybe I will just doing something else in terms of trying to be a good social worker, community worker."

DP I thought that you were going to say that you were a real sharp Greek speaker.

HC No. I thought it was too hard. I thought, "I've got to do something. I'll be a good social worker some other way rather than being multi-lingual." But the reason I use that example of Clarendon Clinic was because it was at the time when there was a huge move to having a community focus on services and Clarendon Clinic was very conscious that it was your standard mental health clinic but at that time in Melbourne there was a Community Health Centre in Collingwood, there was a Community Health Centre in Richmond and in Fitzroy which was dominated by St Vincent's Hospital. The Community Health Centre was a Catholic Health Centre attached to the hospital called The de Paul Centre and so the clinic made the decision that they would base a social worker at Richmond Community Health, Collingwood Community Health but they didn't want to base one at de Paul's so where the person was placed in Fitzroy was the Social Planning Office in Fitzroy and that was me.

That was run by the local council and Fitzroy at that stage, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Brunswick Street is now very trendy restaurants but in those days you had Brunswick Street, on one side there were the housing commission flats with the Fitzroy Legal Service underneath them, that and Redfern were the two community legal centres, you had the Brotherhood of St Laurence, you had community child care, which was and is still going in a sense as NACBACs, the National Association Community Base, but at that stage it was very much Victorian focused community child care and then you had the Social Planning Office. And the Social Planning Office was the Council's contribution to community planning in lots of ways but it also had a particular focus on aged care and early childhood services so they had staff at the Social Planning Office involved in that.



And so I was based there, as the social worker from the Mental Health Clinic, but given a brief to do ‘community work’ and that involved an amazing range of things and with experienced and tremendous people like Jenny Wills, who was the social planning officer at the

time, and so for example, one of the problems was to do with schooling and girls going to school. There was a girls high school called Exhibition High, it was run by a tyrant of a principal, and anytime any of the parents complained the girls got victimised and, at that stage, in Victoria, there was a big move for Parent Councils and there was a legislation passed that said each of the schools had to set up community councils, school councils and they were given four or five models they could use. Well Exhibition High chose the least involving and none of the parents would put themselves forward because they were concerned of victimisation of their students, their children, so we, the group in the community decided we would put up a couple of community nominees to kind of force the pace a bit and that we would kind of be in there and we could clear the way for the parents to come in behind us. So we had a big public meeting and we had done a lot of the background work.

I was one of the people who got elected to represent the community on the school council. The next day, the principal resigned. So she knew the writing was on the wall.

DP That was quick social action.

HC Yeah. So I guess even though I was seen in a traditional, you know you couldn’t get much more traditional than a social worker in a Mental Health Clinic, I guess from my very first job I had the advantage of working in an environment that was very community focussed and you know, doing new things, and people talk about the Fitzroy mafia and there is many people who have been involved in innovative things that you can trace that have had some connection with Fitzroy and it was because there were just so many agencies.

DP They were together on Brunswick Street?

HC They were together on Brunswick Street or on the other side of the flats so you had the, were they called the cubbies or am I getting mixed up with Karawara? But there was the first family day care scheme set up by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in the flats. There was an out of school care programme in the flats in Brunswick Street. It was also where the Aboriginal Medical Service was. One of my current colleagues, although he has just retired, Alan Matheson, who for years has been international officer at the ACTU was at an ecumenical migration centre, as it was then called which drew together people interested in immigration issues. So Fitzroy was really, in my view, where it was all happening, given that it was in a State, and I make this point because it contrasts with WA, in a State where local government had a much more clearly defined role in community development and the provision of community services.

So I certainly have drawn on that experience working in Fitzroy and that was also at the time I finished, I was on placement at the Brotherhood the day Whitlam was sacked, I started work in the beginning of 1976, so it was also at the time when there were massive protests against Fraser for dismantling Medibank and a range of those sort of things that I was part of. So when I came to Perth..

DP Before you get to that, in some of the literature that my students are asked to read there are a number of important organisations that are important in community development’s history. One is the Brotherhood. I know you just did a short stint with the Brotherhood but can you talk about the sorts of things that they were doing?

HC Yeah. I was at the Brotherhood at the time when their Action and Resource Centre for Low Income People was operating which was trying to move away from a model of a welfare



kind of assistance to poor people to looking beyond that and saying, “Well why are people living in poverty?” and “What actually are the resources that they need?”

In fact it is a bit hard to get a job if you don’t have a house.” and so really looking beyond the one-on-one solving the prob-

lems or doing what is perhaps the more traditional, or was then, the traditional social work of seeing the individual and moving beyond that to say, “This is a problem of poverty in our society and we have got to look at ways of coping with that.” I guess because the inner city too, I mean the Brotherhood had a very proud history of working in Fitzroy and helping and they were wanting to say, “Well we have been doing this for forty years. We have got to do something different because we haven’t solved the problem.” And I think you are right, the Australian Assistance Plan, and I have actually got quite a few papers from those days because my brother-in-law was working as a community development officer in the Australian Assistance Plan, and then moved into working in Aboriginal Affairs for many years.

DP Where was he?

HC He was in, somewhere in South Australia, I am just trying to think. He ended up being in Maree for a number of years as an Aboriginal employed but he had quite a lot of the stuff from the AAP and I still think that is a really good framework and when I was going through stuff I thought, “Oh here is all this AAP stuff. Why haven’t we got that on the table now?” but yeah so I think the Brotherhood had a very proud history of involvement in Fitzroy, and the Director at the time was Connie Benn who was much loved, well respected and well known and they started to publish a lot more stuff I think in terms of the ‘tackling poverty’ and other ways of doing it. I think probably that was the time when they started the kind of research focus of it which you still see very much today. I mean they do projects, so they will study forty families in situation x and really look at it in depth so that they can try and analyse

what the factors are. So that was certainly one of the things that came out of that Action and Resource Centre for low-income people. But also practical suggestions like Credit Unions, you know the need for people to have access to credit so that they could kind of get on their feet and stay there.

But I think the other thing is that, while the Brotherhood is an innovative agency and is still seen as an innovative agency, you also had this whole raft of agencies that were seen as much more radical, much more progressive, so that was the beginning, again going back to the Women’s stuff, of the Women’s Refuges, Women’s Health Centres, you know all of that kind of stuff that was really raising, particularly the women’s refuges I think, much more, in a much more controversial way, issues to do with family violence that in a sense the Brotherhood was seeing but wasn’t putting a focus so much on male/female relations within a family. They were perhaps putting it on income relations. So you had a range of those kind of things all happening in Fitzroy.

DP Then the shift to WA?

HC Yeah I had come over to WA on holidays and fell in love and went back to Melbourne and after about two months of a long distance relationship I decided I’d move. So I came over here, I had sort of references and did the rounds of a number of state government departments and they all said, “Yes. This is all very well but we have got a staff freeze on.” And so I started to think, “Oh,”

DP When was this?

HC This was 1977. And so I thought, “Maybe this won’t be as easy as I thought it would be to kind of walk into a job.” And there certainly weren’t very many councils with much of a sort of a social work, let alone kind of community kind of perspective. Fremantle was probably the only council that was doing a lot of stuff. And, it just so happened that the social workers in the Department of Social Security were threatening in-



dustrial action, which was pretty amazing stuff, because of workloads and the outcome of the concerns that they were raising was that the Department agreed to create a position, on their main public enquiry counter in 200 St George's Terrace, or 220 or whatever it was. That was

before they had regional offices, they had a couple I think, so everyone used to come into this main enquiry counter in St George's Terrace and so they agreed to create this position and it just so happened I fronted up, spoke to social worker supervisor Karina Green, and she said, "Yeah well we have got this position but no-one wants it."

DP What was the position you took up?

HC It was the social worker on the main enquiry counter and I said, "Well, you know, I've been working in Fitzroy, I reckon this is, you know, yes." So the interview lasted about ten minutes and I started. For me it was a tremendous job because within the first six months I had met every social worker in Perth so as someone coming new to Perth, to be able to tap into a network, because everyone had to contact Social Security in those days, and so for me it was a tremendous position and the pressure, while it was a pressured job, the pressure of the situation in Perth was not as great as it was in a place like inner-city Melbourne so I didn't find it a difficult job. And then they started to expand and the social workers were attached to regional offices so I was involved in Vic Park. I had bought a house in Vic Park. They had an office, a social work office, in Victoria Park so I got the position there as the social worker and that was at the time when there were a number of social workers in the regional offices of Social Security and we had quite a good group of Social Workers who were trying to do something more than the case work kind of sorting out client problems. So we were involved in a range of community kind of activities in, that were seen as legitimate to our positions as social workers. And that is how I came to be in-

involved with Betsy Buchanan and the Social Security Advocacy Groups that she had established.

DP What sort of things were Social Security Social Workers involved in?

HC Well there was some things that we were involved in publicly, and some things that we weren't, because we had a conservative government, Federal government, we had a conservative State government as well, so I'd have to go back and think about some of the specifics but there was certainly, we worked reasonably closely with groups like Betsy's and the Tenants Advice Service and other kind of groups to try and influence the system, shall we say, to make it more receptive to the kind of issues that they were dealing with but I would have to think a bit better about some specific examples.

DP The Tenant's Advice Bureau and other similar organisations, these were non-government groups who were involved in welfare provision, community interests?

HC Yeah, and many of them I think were funded on a smell of an oily rag literally and existed because of the input of a couple of key kind of people and the ASWU was a bit like that as well. Most of the, that is the Social Welfare Union, most of the people who were active in the Social Welfare Union were not using the Union for their own industrial protection, I mean people like myself. I was a member of the what was then The Professional Officers Association, which was the relevant union in Social Security, and people were members of the ASWU I think more because there had been a split in the mid seventies between the Australian Association of Social Workers and the Social Welfare Union and my sense is that that split was greater in a place like Melbourne

So you were either one or the other. You were either interested in the professional body or you were interested in being an activist and if you were wanted to be an activist you were a



member of the ASWU and I mean I joined the ASWU out of Uni and had been a member ever since until I joined the MISCO'S. So I think there were groups like that were, so under the auspices of the ASWU and I think, again I would need to look back, but I am sure

Dave Buchanan, Betsy's partner, was president for a long time, or vice-president, and Betsy was involved, Tony Cook was an active member.

DP Of the Australian Social Welfare Union?

HC Of ASWU and, oh I can see her face from UWA, I just can't think of her name.

DP Not Jan Carter?

HC No. I will think of it. But, yeah so there were a group of people involved in ASWU and I mean the community work we're involved in though as social workers in social Security wasn't very radical kind of stuff. It was more about, "What can we do to try and build up community networks?" One of the projects for example, that I was involved in, was a kind of social indicator study within the department, so looking at, and this is classic social needs stuff, "Where do you put your resources?" "You put them in areas of greatest need." "How do you decide what is the greatest need?" "Social indicators." and trying to do that and trying to apply that to the kind of resources within Social Security. So it wasn't the activism as such but it was that community planning, trying to broaden the perspective from the one-on-one. And I worked for Social Security for a couple of years and then got offered a position at WAIT, as it was then, the WA Institute of Technology, in the School of Social Work.

DP When was this?

HC This was in 1979. And that was at the time when the School of Social Work, the Head of the School of Social Work was a community worker, a professor from community work background, Eric Butterworth who was from York University and so he came in and very much had a community kind of perspective on it and, one of the things that WAIT did in those days was they had started Sussex Street Centre as an agency for the staff to keep up their skills so, and it was a counselling centre for staff of the school of Social Work to keep up their skills as social workers so it was a counselling centre. I went to WAIT half way through 1979 and Stuart Flynn, who was on the staff of WAIT at that time, he had only relatively come from the UK as well, Stuart is now the Director of Southern Cross Nursing Homes. Stuart was responsible for Sussex Street at that time and basically I was asked to take on Sussex Street, co-ordinator of Sussex Street and turn it into a community agency. So move it from a sort of social work agency for the school of social work to a community agency.

DP For how long was it a clinic?

HC Yeah it was basically a clinic, only a couple of years from memory and so it was a little house in Sussex Street, it is in the same location now but at that stage there were a row of little houses, and it was 29 Sussex Street, and behind it was the Lady Gowrie Centre which subsequently, they had bought the land in Karawara, where they currently are, but that was the original Lady Gowrie and Lady Gowrie was a demonstration childcare centre. There was one in each state so that was on our back fence.

DP When you say demonstration clinic, it was a place for those training?

HC No demonstration in the sense that it was funded over and above other childcare centres to provide demonstrations I guess of 'best practice'. So there was one set up in each state in the 1940's, I think it was, called Lady Gowrie because it



was, Lady Gowrie was, Lord Gowrie was the Governor General and it was somehow came out her interest in child care, I think, or early childhood development. At the time I was still teaching a number of units but they were mainly community work units, and responsible for supervising

social work students. There was a range of things that we did out of Sussex Street that I think were quite innovative at the time. One of them for example was placements, or secondments into politicians offices, which no-one had done, and because I was building up the links with people locally which, bear in mind I lived in Vic Park, I worked as a social worker in Social Security in Vic Park, and Sussex Street is in Vic Park, so I was drawing on involvement through previous work, like with the local Community Support Scheme and that sort of stuff. So there were placements like that.

One of the other things that we did was community contact, what we called 'contact lunches' which were getting together the agencies in the community once a month at lunchtime to discuss issues of kind of common concern. And they were held in Vic Park, they were held in Karawara, which is, at that stage, is the suburb adjoining WAIT but was predominantly Housing Commission. I mean now it is quite different, but then it was pretty much Housing Commission, and Lady Gowrie had moved there and that was the site that we used. And we went reasonably far afield in the sense that Gosnells was a community that was interested in this and so we, through Bob Pearce who was the Local Member at the time, he worked with Sussex Street to set up a series of community lunches, 'community contact lunches' and a number of services grew out of that. The original Gosnells Legal Service grew out of, in a sense people coming together saying, "Well what are the needs in this community?" and "What can we do about them?"

So there were a range of things that were done at Sussex Street that I feel very, very proud of, in a sense of being able to initiate kind of, I guess, the basis of community action of bringing

people together, having the ability to sit down and talk about it and then actually do something about the problems you identify. And so I think Sussex Street was able to do that and we were able to do things like, one of the programmes that was run was by one of the Community Health Nurses who wanted to provide a sort of Mothers Group so she used Sussex Street as the venue for doing that. It was a non-threatening kind of place. It was a house easy for people to come to and so we thought, "Mmm. Need to provide childcare while this is happening." So the way we provided childcare, which given what I then subsequently went on to do, totally unlicensed, but I went back to WAIT and I arranged with the Education department that there would be people doing their teaching qualifications to come and provide childcare as a kind of work experience. That was one semester and the second semester was with the School of Nursing and they saw it as really useful to have nursing students seeing healthy children and being able to work with healthy children. Subsequently I became organiser for childcare and a great advocate for quality childcare, and I still am, but I guess we weren't doing anything illegal in the sense that the regulations at the time provided that the parents were on the premises you were fine, you didn't have to have licensed childcare workers and that sort of thing.

And I guess it probably was a fairly typical example of how, when you are trying to do those community activities, you make the best of, and you scrounge resources where you can, and by having access to WAIT and I was very keen to ensure that Sussex Street wasn't just seen as social work and to try and to make links into other departments and so saw what I was doing was a good thing. I think if I was probably doing it now I would want to provide a proper childcare service and would want to be advocating that funding need to take account of that and be sufficient that you could provide that sort of proper service. But you know you learn these things and, as I say, probably reflective of the sort of how many community activities start with trying to draw on the resources that you have got.



DP Within the constraints that they are under at the time?

HC Yeah. So Sussex Street was, I guess a pretty intense period. A couple of years of community work and I was able to draw on experiences there in the teach-

ing that I was doing but also because it was WAIT's own agency. We would have a dozen students on placement at a time so it was run as a placement sort of unit. So there were quite a few students who actually had experience of Sussex Street but WAIT was starting to make noises about funding and cutbacks in funding, and at the time I was a community representative on the Legal Aid Commission, and I had been talking about this to Len Robert Smith, who was the director of the Legal aid Commission at that time, and he said, "Why don't you apply for community legal aid funding, federal money?"

DP Let's go back before that time. Had Sussex Street being involved in advocacy legal work?

HC None. None. And I am talking 1982. I was director for '80 and '81 and then in 1982 I went part time because I was at Murdoch studying. I thought I should get a Masters, Degree. Murdoch wouldn't accept my original qualifications without having done, Honours, so I had to do a sort of an Honours year. So I was doing that part time and working part time so someone else took over the co-ordination of Sussex Street. But the funding was under threat so Len suggested applying for CLAF as it was called then, Community Legal Aid Funding. So I did and it got granted and that is how Sussex Street started as a Legal Service and the Department of Community Services I guess it was then, was supportive in terms of, they prepared to allocate some of the, there was a position that was called Homemaker, which was a kind of advisory position for families, and a number of the staff they allocated kind of to be based at Sussex Street.

And so it was able to grow into a very different kind of agency and the CLAF funding was used to employ a co-ordinator and she, as one of her very early tasks, re-wrote the Fitzroy Legal Service, the big handbook, with all the different sections on the law and how that applies. She re-wrote it for WA and I think was aiming to use that as a kind of generator of funds as both Redfern and Fitzroy had done. I don't know that that necessarily succeeded but it was a classic community legal service in the sense of having a group of committed lawyers who were on the board and you know, community management committee and that sort of stuff and it has grown from there.

So it started from the sort of Social Work Department and I also was finding it very difficult at that time, I mean I think I was in the most ideal environment to do further academic studies, but I was finding the difficulty of the theory and the practice. I have never been really big on the theory I find it difficult when I was teaching because my view is unless the theory actually explains what you are doing and why, or helps you to understand it, it is no use and I am not big on sort of esoteric theories. So I was finding the course work at Murdoch difficult. I completed all the course work but I dropped out without finishing my Honours Thesis.

DP What was the discipline?

HC SAPT, Social and Political Theory. And I mean I had Cora Baldock as my supervisor, as I say the environment was, the best I think you could have to pursue an academic career. I was working part time, I was physically situated at WAIT, so I was in a supportive environment, I had access to the library, photocopying, you name it, but I just found it too difficult. I just couldn't cope with, what to me was just theory not making sense with the practice,

And I had got involved with the local Community Youth Support Scheme which is in Vic Park, which was about assisting unemployed people and through that we established the Vic-



toria Park Youth Accommodation Service which was based on a kind of community housing model whereby we actually had one house. We started with one house. The service has now got over thirty but we started with one house and it was about having people live in a house with a supportive environment so that the two project officers at the time acted as the support people in the first house. And it was not for homeless people as such but it was more for the people that were coming through their door at the Community Youth Support Scheme who were unemployed, who couldn't get a job because they didn't have accommodation, and so we were providing accommodation but needed to provide some support as well. So people paid rent and the Community Support Scheme Committee became a committee for the Youth Accommodation Service.

Because I had been involved in that I basically got asked to be the Chair of the Youth Affairs Council of WA and having been involved in that I then became the National President of the Youth Affairs Council of Australia. And that was, sorry I have missed a year.

So I was involved in Youth Affairs stuff and just, my thesis that I was doing was about dependency and I was drawing on women's stuff and youth work stuff for that and I just decided, "Nup. I couldn't do it." and I got a job in an organisation called Community Task Force, which was in the Education Department, and it was funded to promote community involvement in schools.

DP In which year?

HC 1983. And, it had a community committee that was chaired by the nominee of WACSO, the WA Council of Schools Organisation, a parent organisation and it had someone from the Teachers Union, someone from the Principals Association, a range of people on the Committee that I, as the executive offi-

cer, worked towards. It was a relatively new position. It was funded from Commonwealth money and my predecessor, her approach had been to focus on a couple of schools and put a lot of effort into those schools and build up the kind of community involvement. I guess I took a different approach and thought, "Well that is pretty easy to dismantle. You change the principal, the commitment goes, and you are back to square one." So I took an approach having much more of a network to it and trying to draw together people across the state who were interested in this issue and then try and say, "Well what kind of resources do you need to get involved in your schools?" And I stood on a few toes in doing that and basically the person who did my secretarial work, who also did secretarial work to the department, towards the end of that year said to me, "Helen, you don't know this, and I basically think it is outrageous, they are trying to get rid of you. Here is the minutes I have just been asked to type." So I read the minutes and they basically had decided to do away with the position and so I got involved in the committee supported me in some lobbying and some political lobbying to try and save that position and at the end of the day I guess it was a useful experience for me in terms of bureaucracy, and how it works, and the way people will lie and manipulate the truth and the way, you know, it works in terms of 'report goes to this person and then it goes to the next person and so on up the line', To cut a long story short, basically I wasn't dismissed as such, the funding just disappeared and so the position was made redundant. By that stage I had been asked to take over as National President of the Youth Affairs Council.

DP This work was interested in encouraging state schools to build community connections, or to pursue the idea of it being a sort of hub of resourceful communities?

HC Yeah. Particularly, I guess it drew on some parents who were interested in their child's schooling and wanted to have more of a say in that and, in some ways, in conflict with the teachers, like they knew best what their child should be taught. So



there was that element of it in a sense, but it was also about how do you utilise this resource that you have got out there of parents, beyond the traditional fund raising, but to have people involved in their school so that you are enhancing your child's education by having this sort of resource that is out there being utilised?"

DP **So there were a range of schools undertaking a range of initiatives?**

HC Yep. They might have something like a parent's meeting room, to encourage parents to come in and, by doing that, you can identify particular skills maybe that parents had that could be utilised for the school community. But it was also about trying to empower parents who felt that they wanted to have more of a say. There was, again going back to my days in Melbourne, and I am not sure of you know the history of Joan Kerner, the former Premier in Victoria but her background was in the schools Organisation. She was a school parent activist and while I didn't fully appreciate the subsequent links, the first time I met Joan was when I was working the social planning office in Melbourne and involved in work we were doing at Exhibition High for Fitzroy Girls. I had gone to a conference that had been organised about community involvement in schools at which Joan was one of the key sort of participants and yeah, so I was aware of, again, quite a lot of stuff being done in Victoria and was just able to draw on that sort of stuff.

DP **And was there a movement or a coalition of the groups involved in WA or was this really a feature of the Education Department trying to inject community work into their activities?**

HC I think it was, in a sense, a bit of both because I think there was during the seventies much greater, you know, well there was I remember that article Martin Malbray wrote called "Community: The spray on solution." Community was at-

tached to everything, there was a sense that you wanted to be involved, community involvement in schools, community health service, community legal services, so it was part of a broader movement in society that said, "Yes we have got a right to be involved in these things." But this was specifically funded through the Education Department, and it wasn't compulsory in any way, it was a voluntary sort of thing, of funding these sort of projects where schools wanted to do something to involve the community more. My attitude was to provide much greater networking between the parents who wanted to be involved and provide resources to them and training and that sort of stuff so they could sustain the effort that they wanted to do rather than relying on just a sort of project here or there.

DP **And while you were involved in this work you had some involvement with the Youth Affairs Council of West Australia?**

HC Yeah. And 1985 was International Youth Year and so there was quite a lot of action gearing up around the place and I was asked if I would be President. I was elected to be President in 1984, and while the Youth Affairs Council was based in Melbourne and I thought, "Mmm I don't know that I am going to be able to do this and hold down a real job at the same time." So I finished up at Community Task Force. I found it very different bureaucracy, and maybe it is just education, I mean given that I had worked in Social Security before, but theirs was a system of, "You started at 8:25 and finished at 4:19." or whatever it was and I have never worked like that. It used to piss me off that I wouldn't get there at 8:25, for want of a better word, I would be there at quarter to nine and I would get very disparaging looks but I'd leave at 6:00, because I've always worked longer hours, and people would be there at 8:15 but they would be sitting reading the paper and having a coffee. They wouldn't actually be working but just that strictures of you know, "You had to start, and you had to finish." I found very difficult.



Yeah so the year that I was President of YACA I thought, “Well I am going to have to do something.” And just, very fortuitously, with a Labor Government having come in and having established the Carter Review into Welfare.

Jan Carter, who I had got to know through the Social Welfare Action Group, which I realised I haven’t talked about at all, but that was a group that was established in the late 70’s as a group, again as an activist group, but it also included quite a number of Social Workers employed by the State Government. And it provided a cover, in a sense, for them because we had a number of examples where people had, say written a letter to the paper and they had been hauled before the Director General with a, “Please explain.” Particularly when Bill Hassell was the Minister for Community Welfare, and he was also the Minister for Police. And it was at a time when activism was really, attempts were made to really put the lid on it.

And I can’t remember how, off the top of my head, how SWAG formed but I fished out all the papers so there may well be stuff in there.

But it was basically a group of social workers who came together who were involved, not so much in community work, but more social action and needed an umbrella for that. And so I had got to know Jan through that and, when she was appointed as the Director of that Review, I learnt a lot from Jan in terms of the way she conducted that review and the way she tried to facilitate participation in the review. She had particular areas like disability, and so brought all the people involved into disability, consumers and providers, together in a kind of forum to talk about, “What are the issues?” “What do we need to do about it?” and I was employed to facilitate a number of those sorts of groups.

DP By the Department?

HC By the Review, by Jan, by the Review, and so that was very good and I also was employed by Jan to be the proof reader for her final report. So I was kind of working from home in the final stages actually, I have realised, that was when I dropped out of my studies and I was going off to Melbourne with the Youth Affairs Council and I was doing this sort of work. And I guess the thing I would say about the Youth Affairs Council, in terms of being a body, it pulled together the Youth Organisations, the young people, the youth workers and the structures. There was a state based council and we had two day meetings in Melbourne and the executive officer was a guy called Michael Cossi, who I also learnt a lot from about how you run a meeting and get through a huge agenda in two days, bringing people from all over the country. He was just a very, you know, every agenda item had a background paper, what you hoped to get out of it and chairing two day meetings wasn’t an easy thing to do but he was a very, very competent executive officer and so I think I learnt quite a lot of skills from him and from just that experience in terms of how you do that, how you run those sort of meetings and that has stood me in very good stead in terms of bigger, public meetings and that sort of stuff.

Yeah so I guess that was quite a good experience. I mean I was, in 1984, so I was 31, so a bit beyond the definition of a young person but still kind of young enough. I guess because of people, very experienced people like Ian Yates and Michael Cusack and Michael Cossi, and the links that they had with the other sort of peak bodies, Because we were trying to, you know, put ourselves up there with the ... and the Ethnic, well I don’t know what it was called in those days, but what is now FECCA, the peak body in those areas and the peak ACROD the disability peak.. As well as that exposure through the youth work field, the Youth Affairs field, there was also, in the lead up to International Youth Year, and also trying to be a player in that broader community peak body sector, that was actually very useful for me as well in terms of, again, learning new kind of skills.



But one of the things that happened, out of one of the outcomes of Jan's review, was the establishment of the Child Care Planning Committee and, you remember in 1983 we had both a state and federal Labor government and there was a new programme and a child care

planning process set in place and originally it was Grace Vaughan who chaired the Child Care Planning Committee and she tragically died and Moira Raynor took over as chair and the executive officer for the Child Care Planning Committee was actually an old mate of mine.

When I worked in Social Security, I did a couple of months stint at the head office in Canberra and got to know this woman called Susan May and Susan actually knew my brother in law, because they both worked in the AAP days. Susan and her partner Bob wanted to come to WA, there was a family connection, anyway they wanted to open a restaurant and so they used to have these huge sort of meals in Canberra that they would cook for all their friends to give them practice at cooking for 20-25 people. So basically by that stage Susan was working, they operated a guest house in Margaret River, but Susan was looking for something more to do and this job came up as the Executive Officer of the Child Care Planning Committee in 1984 that was being established, and Susan was well placed for that and she got the job. So she actually moved up from Margaret River and lived with me for the first couple of months.

And so we were very close and worked quite closely together and they went from a position of having a planning process put in place and setting up community based Children's Services and they got to the stage where they actually had advertised and appointed two people as community workers to help them facilitate these committees. They had appointed the people and the day that one of these people was due to start she rang up and said, "I've got another job." So Susan tore her hair out and said, "What am I going to do?" and I said, "Well I'd be

happy to cover as long as you give me time off, I can tell you when I need to be in Melbourne for YACA things but I am actually not doing a great deal. I'd be happy to do it."

So I actually had the job as one of the Community Development Officers working with the Child Care Planning Committee and it was through that, because what my predecessor, as it turned out at the Union, had done with the Lady Gowrie Centre was negotiated an award for the Lady Gowrie that reflected the fact that you had people who were trained teachers, trained childcare workers and untrained childcare workers. The teachers worked teachers' wages and conditions. So they were 32 ½ hours a week, they had eleven weeks annual leave, the trained childcare workers, worked a 38 hour week and had six weeks annual leave and the untrained had a 40 hour week and had 4 weeks annual leave, and the union had negotiated with the Lady Gowrie an award that standardised everyone's conditions to 37 ½ hours and six weeks leave. There was a huge outcry and opposition from the teachers unions that the union had sold out its members but it was to other people, it was just a marvellous achievement, that here were people working side by side who no longer had inequitable conditions.

And so the union had negotiated that and, at the time when the first three community based centres were being built, people said, "It would be really good to have the same kind of award applying to these community-based centres." So I was the community development officer negotiating with the Union about how could we apply this award to these three new centres and, under Industrial Relations, there is the terminology called 'consent' which means the employer and the union agree and so the first award that came in was called The Children's Services Consent Award because the Community Management Committees agreed that, "Yes. This sounded like a very good idea to have everyone on the same conditions."

And so I got to meet the people from the Union and had this absolutely classic situation where Judy Trigwell, who had been the person who had been the organiser, who had negotiated the



Gowrie Award, had been on maternity leave, had come back from maternity leave and found it just too difficult when her child got to be about eight or nine months. She resigned. The President of the Union at the time was from the Lady Gowrie Centre, someone who I knew

who had come in as the temporary organiser in Child Care. Lorraine rang me up and said, “Jim McGinty and I want to talk to you about who is around in the Child Care area. Can we take you to lunch?” So I said, “Yes.” And there we are having lunch, totally naive me, we are talking about “Oh there is so and so.” And Jim says, “Well what about you?” and I said, “Oh. Never thought of working for a Union before.”

And so basically I was offered the position as the organiser in childcare and I guess I was very lucky coming into the job, I started in the beginning of 1985, came into the job where it was, because of the work Judy had done, and it was originally a childcare, preschool and childcare union that had amalgamated in with the MISCO’s. They were seen to have much more of a role than just wages and conditions and it was much more about policy, you know the Union was represented on all the kind of committees, the review of licensing, the union was there. So very prominent position and because of the childcare planning arrangements there were new centres being built and I was one of the people then on the Childcare Planning Committee and I think the model that was put in place in WA was the best model in Australia. I still think that and people still talk about the model that people like Jan Carter and Moira Raynor devised as a very good model. So you go to meetings now and people talk about, “Well what should we be doing in relation to childcare?” and you talk about that and, “Oh, don’t you know that is the way to go?”

DP Can you describe this model and how it contrasted with others?

HC

It perhaps, had a few Stalinist features, for want of a better word, in that it did things like saying, “OK we have got this bucket of money, we are going to build centres in the communities that need them, bearing in mind that the previous system was a submission based model, so it was who could write submissions which, in effect, has served WA well because that is why we had centres throughout the North West because local councils put in submissions and we have those facilities. So it was based on a kind of needs model but it actually took into account the full number of licensed places. So not just community places but private sector places as well. Whereas a state like Victoria pretended the private sector didn’t exist and so only counted the community places, which is why you had a community centre built just down the street from a private centre which, when the funding changed and there was a competition, lead to problems.

But why I say that we were a bit Stalinist is because we thought, “Right. If you let every community design their own childcare centre they are all going to be spending \$20,000 on architects fees. Why don’t we,” and what we did was put out a tender for a design and it was actually a house with an atrium in it, which won the design and so every centre, “Here is the design.” Now it doesn’t look institutionalised because it was a house anyway and the feature about the atrium was every childcare centre used the atrium in a different way. So some childcare centres used it as an atrium in a house like with plants and stuff, others used it as the quiet room for children, others basically didn’t build the atrium but moved walls or whatever. So we were in fact able to build more facilities because we controlled the money and how it was to be spent and said, “You are not wasting money on architects fees and everyone designing their own.” and we had the bulk purchasing ability of, “Yeah we are letting the contract for you to build seven centres.” And the price to build seven centres was cheaper than seven people building individual centres. So, while some might argue, “Well that is not very community involved in the sense of letting local communities decide.”



From our point of view it was about, again, stretching the money in a way, but it was a very transparent process. I mean everything was done through an open tender and so communities were given a draft constitution that they could change but they didn't have to spend the time

doing that. They could incorporate themselves along that model. "Here is the plan for the centre." "Here is this." So it was providing, in my view, it was a very good model because it gave people control over things that really matter. Now some people might argue, "Well it does matter what sort of building you've got." In my view it didn't. Not in my category of "Really matter." And that is what I say; I think it was a true planning model. It was proper planning providing those resources. And we had negotiated the award with the union so that award applied to all of the centres that were being built. So again people didn't have to individually think about that, or negotiate that.

DP Did that contrast with what happened in other states?

HC Yeah because it wasn't as controlled and because the mechanism, in a sense, came out of the review so it was established as a Childcare Planning Committee and the Child Care Planning Committee put out newsletters and all that sort of thing so it was very transparent about what it was doing. Whereas in other states it was more run by departments, by the relevant departments in some cases or, as I say, the planning mechanism wasn't as tight and so really just did it in terms of allocating places, well not quite on submission but it didn't take into account the range of factors that we were taking into account here in WA in terms of putting services in where the need should go. And it was then able to be adapted by a subsequent state Labor Government who set up family centres so, using again the childcare, again a planning model and saying, "In addition to straight childcare centres we actually want to provide centres that are a base for a whole range of services to

families." And so, again, the Commonwealth/State agreement was used to fund that which didn't happen in other states.

DP What do you think were some of the unique features of WA that allowed for that to happen?

HC Well the contrast that I know best is WA and Victoria. I don't think Victoria, with the strong local government involvement would have let a state government get away with that basically. Whereas, in WA because you didn't have that strong infrastructure, that community work infrastructure, the state government, in a sense I suppose it was a top down approach. Because it came out of the Welfare Review, and that was a very comprehensive review that I think, because of the calibre of people, like Jan Carter who were involved, it had a credibility so I don't think people saw it as being imposed on them. They just saw it as, "Yes we have had this Review. This government is now implementing it and actually putting some money into things like Childcare." And people were very supportive of that. But what you don't have still, and what you didn't have then, was the strong local government and the range of other agencies that you have got in a place like Victoria so I think it was possible to have what probably people saw as that 'top down approach' or it was being driven by the state and so I think that is perhaps the most fundamental difference I'd see.

So yes I started at the Union in 1985 and I am still here but, and I think you can see in those things that the Union has been involved in, my sort of social work background comes out, or campaigning background. But what is absolutely fascinating to me is talking with people who, you know the union movement is going through a fairly intense period of change and I guess the easiest way to describe it is those unions that see themselves as being an organising focussed union as opposed to what's, there is a sort of dichotomy in the jargon between an organising focussed union and a service union. What is very interesting is the language of the organising union, is commu-



nity work language; it is ‘empowerment’ and so I have pulled out old texts like Alinsky’s stuff and people read this and go, “Oh wow this is really good stuff.” Friere, which were texts that were sort of, you know that is 60’s, 70’s stuff and people who have come up through the unions

with no exposure to any of this community work stuff, youth work stuff, anything like that are really sort of, “Oh wow. This is really interesting stuff.” And I think if you look at the sort of campaigns that the union was involved in during the ‘90’s where we were fighting the government over things like privatisation and contracting out, many of the kind of tactics that we used as a union are your classic community sort of campaign tactics.

DP Can you give us some examples?

HC Oh just the kind of ‘taking it beyond the workplace’ so that most unions would see, “OK if you are going to fight an issue you do it by industrial action at the workplace.” Now if you look at say the Health Industry, what we were fighting was contracting out of services. So how do you fight to keep a catering service at a hospital? Well from our point of view we had to do more than take industrial action, have workers going on strike. We had to get the community on side and so in country areas we did that by looking at issues like employment in the local area and getting people onside. I mean the contracting out in country hospitals was a lot less than Kierath would have wanted and that was because we went to lobby Hendy Cowan as the leader of the National Party and talked to him about the impact on country towns of losing jobs in country hospitals and we know that he took on Kierath in Cabinet. And we reckon Hendy won because Kierath only lasted less than 12 months as Health Minister.

But what we also did was make sure that everywhere that Graham Kierath went we had members with placards and that sort of thing saying, “Save our Jobs. “We want our jobs.” And I

can remember one, and we’ve got the footage of it somewhere, but he was out at Osborne Park and he drove through a protest line that we had and he drove into our banner and actually pulled it into his car and so there was a bit of an issue, it was all on the TV and he said something like, “Well this is just a pack of Union yobbo’s.” or something, and the camera panned and there was the row of all our members, all in our uniforms, all clearly middle aged women, who were not union yobbos, and it just made it so, such a good shot because here was him dismissing people as just shit stirrers and that sort of thing. So the importance of the members being involved, being empowered.

The difference that I see now, as opposed to the kind of campaign based stuff that I was involved in, is there has been a much greater transfer of power to the delegates at the workplace so what I would say to you is the feature of an organising union now is that sustainability at the workplace because of the delegate structures. So we have put a lot of effort and a lot of time into training delegates, giving delegates greater responsibilities at the work place and what is fascinating is, if you look at say a union say like ours, where we have got a governing body structure, where we struggle to get a quorum for people to come to state council and yet we get 300 people to a delegates convention. And I think that reflects the shift, it is partially people are comfortable with the leadership and direction the union is being taken in, but that is the sort of stuff they want to do; come to a delegates convention and hear about what is happening at other work places, what skills they can learn. They are not interested in coming along to boring meetings and so it has been a very interesting shift within the union to have that sort of stuff. We, as a union, recently, two to three years ago increased the size of our governing body, the National Council from 65 to 100 and the National Secretary’s view almost was, “Well that is all you need to do.” Like, “We have increased the rank and file participation.” and I said, “No. You have got to actually change the structure of the council because you can’t just, just by increasing the numbers, doesn’t



increase participation. It looks like that on paper but you've actually got to change the structure and give people more sense of participating."

Now you know that is straight community work stuff being applied to unions. And I guess one of the other things I am interested in doing and I've seen, again, the union shift, and I think Tony Cook and I, because we both come from a social work background, we saw that during the nineties here, and I don't know if Tony talked about that, but the building up of community alliances, and that comes naturally to us as unionists, Tony and I. It doesn't come naturally to other unions and you know, that happened during the course of First Wave, Second Wave, Third Wave. It really came to the fore during the MUA dispute. It was clearly picked up. I mean people in other states looked at WA and the successes we had had during those campaigns.

DP Can you talk some more about this? Can you explain what the First, Second and Third Wave Industrial campaigns were and the MUA dispute and what sort of alliances developed and how community were involved in these campaigns?

HC The First Wave, Second Wave and Third Wave refer to three series of legislations that Graham Kierath, as the Minister for Industrial Relations, introduced and they got progressively more anti-union. But the first wave, one of the most fundamental aspects of that was the introduction for the first time of individual contracts which meant that the award system, which is a system of a framework agreement which governs people's wages and conditions, could be undercut by what was called 'an individual contract' and it had very serious ideological implications because it was clothed in the guise of choice, that people could choose whether to be employed under an award, or choose to be employed under an individual contract. And the reality for most workers, and particularly the kind of work-

ers that union, the LHMU covers, is they had no choice. It was either, "You sign or resign or you don't get the job." and so it is very difficult to counter that with, by the workers involved themselves because they were basically either intimidated into signing these contracts or else they weren't, they didn't get the job.

So it was something that the union movement had to take up on their behalf and what we tried to do, I guess we had, rather than industrial action, mass sort of protest action. We tried to draw in other groups who were concerned about that. And there was a range of community organisation who were concerned about that because they could see the impact on their clients. But it was also people who just saw, particularly the churches, we lobbied the churches a lot, that this was going down the wrong path, this was setting up situations where people were being threatened, where they didn't have secure employment, but it also meant that we had forums, or we had speakers at our rallies and that sort of thing, who didn't just come from the union movement.

But I think one of the other innovative things that we did was add colour and movement to it in the sense of people like Bernard Carney, who is a well known kind of folk singer around town, actually wrote a song for each of the First, Second and Third Waves. So people were singing rather than necessarily using that agro chant that is associated with unions. People were singing. And I remember speaking at the First big rally, which was in 1992 in Forrest Place, and what the rally was, "If we elect a Liberal Government, this is what we will get. Kennett style industrial relations." Because the Kennett government had been elected in Victoria in 1992. So the first big rally was really saying, "Watch out. This is what is going to happen." And it was an amazing experience to stand at Forrest Place and look down on this sort of sea of faces but one of the people who also spoke at that rally was a nineteen-year-old worker. So I mean I guess it is again drawing on the youth



work sort of stuff. You just don't have the heavies speaking. You actually try and bring the people who are going to be affected by these things in to the public limelight as well.

And so that is what I mean by some of the tactics, and certainly the sort of innovative tactics within the union movement that lead to the establishment of Solidarity Park. The Workers Embassy. That actually came about because we decided that we wanted something permanent, we were looking at the Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra and saying, "How can we have a permanent tent in the grounds of Parliament House?" Someone came up with the idea of, "Well if we had a caravan and we called it a First Aid Post and so that is what we did, and because we were the Health Union, we staffed it with our Health Workers and that was fine. We refused to move it and you know, the officials and members who were down there for that first twenty four hours, they say, "Oh no sorry we can't do it without Helen's permission." And of course Helen was nowhere to be found. "No. No. We can't do it. She is on her way. She will be down here." And basically we kept them off for the first twenty four hours and then the next union was them CFMEU, the BL's and it was that night that the cops said, "Nup. We are just dismantling this." And Kim Young convinced them rather than taking the caravan, there was no air in the tyres so it was going to be very difficult to tow, "Why don't you don't just park it across the road?" and so they parked it in what they thought was just a bit of vacant land for the car park and that is where it stayed.

And that is how the Workers Embassy was set up and Solidarity Park. And I think again that was another example of trying to then bring in community groups to say, "Yes support us." And the importance of having a kind of focus where people could come. And so teachers could come and bring their class of students to Solidarity Park or the Workers Embassy. So I think the success of that, and we kept the Workers Embassy staffed 24 hours a day for 6 months and there were a whole lot

of traditions and cultures that grew up and it was a time where it pulled a lot of people together. The following year, 1997, was when the Maritime dispute happened and I think the other states looked at what we had done during those industrial campaigns and said, "Yes this is the way to go. Community." And so we didn't have picket lines, we had community protest lines and I guess because, again looking at WA and Fremantle, being the kind of community it is there were genuinely, it was a community protest. It wasn't just union people. And people saw, I guess that Pastor ... sign, "They came for the unionists and I wasn't a unionist. Who were they coming for next?" That sort of sense. I had a real feeling that people had that, and so that that was where people were prepared to draw the line in the sand and say, "Yeah. We have got to stop this." And that had been building up here because of that industrial stuff.

DP What sort of people and how many were involved in the dispute?

HC Oh at times there were thousands down on the sort of protest lines because they had four entrances I think, from memory, and all of them had people there and at significant points in the dispute, I guess because it was so well covered in the media, you saw the footage on the news that something was going to happen and so people just flocked down there.

DP If they weren't workers, what sort of people were involved?

HC Oh I think there were a range of people. People brought their kids. People brought their grandparents. The number of people that I can remember talking to who, you know, had been a member of a union twenty years ago and thought that they would come down and show their support. But, yeah, most people kind of had a connection some way or another but there were a number of people who were just there because they thought it was outrageous and they thought they should do something about it.



DP And the campaign very much drew on this idea of ‘community involvement’?

HC Yeah of community.

DP I remember T-shirts in the MUA dispute celebrated the fact that it was a ‘community’ picket line.

HC T-shirts. Yeah and the facilities down there. I think most people would remember that footage of the two little kids screaming as the police moved in which, you know that really wasn’t representative of what it was like because we were always very conscious. I mean from the very first we had women and kids in the front because we wanted to give a very different image of, “This was a union movement embracing everyone.” It wasn’t your standard caricatured, union official, big hefty bloke in the singlet and stubby shorts. “This was about you and me and your kids.” and so the people involved and the images of the people involved had to reflect that.

But I think there was also, I mean I can remember suggesting that we needed to do training sessions on non-violent action and of course went back to my filing draw and pulled out the manual on non-violent action. Now that is something that in the union movement, I guess I had sufficient respect and because the MISCO’S was clearly at the forefront of so many of these things, and because of our members who were being affected. I think there was some people who think, “Oh gawd. What is this sort of woossie idea.” But it was taken seriously so we did actually do some training sessions on ‘passive resistance’ and again drew on; I was drawing on the community work stuff to do that.

So, for me there has always been those real linkages and what I am involved in, in my current work under our umbrella of ‘fair wages and decent work’, is saying, “We are not going to be able to do anything to change the situation of our members

in low paid jobs unless we build the alliances with the community organisations who are also concerned about this.” So we have got union officials who, you know it is easy for me, I have been a member of WACCOSS for, you know, thirty years almost but you have got some of our other officials of the union who are, for the first time, approaching community organisations and starting to understand how community organisations work, the kind of people that are involved, and realising there is that commonality. So I think it is a really kind of interesting time for us as a union movement that has gone from the sort of MUA dispute the protests, sort of the campaign to OK let’s extend this into, for want of a better expression, ‘more bread and butter work.’

So that again in an area like aged care there is group called NACA, the National Aged Care Alliance which brings together the providers, the consumer groups, the unions, the professional organisations like the gerontologists and that sort of thing and the academics and that is something that I think is really good. We have been working quite closely in the child-care area with NACBACS, the National Association of Community Based Children’s Services and trying to build up parents committees to work with us. While they are sort of focussed on funding for childcare, for us the issue is workers wages, and unless there is increased funding so workers can be paid higher wages then you are not going to have quality child care because there is the turnover of staff. So trying to identify, “What are the issues?” that people see the intersection that we are working together. And so we have done up a child care charter about the rights of children and the rights of child-care workers which we are getting parents to sign as well as workers.

So yeah, as I say there is some current examples of where I see that we have been able to draw on that sort of community work experience.

DP **Is it fair to say that there are some things about West Australia that make it unique in helping build a connection between community work and unionism? Are you saying that the West Australian experience over the last ten years has been a little bit different to what is happening elsewhere in trade union work?**



HC I think, without wanting to put either myself or Tony Cook on a pedestal, or unnecessarily blow our own trumpet, but I think the fact that you had two of the most senior union leaders in the state who both have got a social work background is reflected, to some extent, in the approach the union movement has taken. And the fact that it is generally considered the industrial legislation that we were facing was the most anti-worker and most anti-union in the country, and our response to that I guess drew on our community work and community activist backgrounds and so I think that is seen as quite different.

DP **Did it have anything to do with local history? Was there something about Fremantle that helped the community picket line kind of focus to work?**

HC I think that there was a bit of that. I mean if you look at MUA dispute, and I am not familiar totally with all of the ports around Australia but the Port of Fremantle is right in Fremantle and is a working port whereas in Melbourne it is industrial areas, and I don't know Sydney well enough but my sense is that it is the same. Whereas Fremantle, it was right there. It was right on people's doorstep and so that was a bit different. But I think there is other things too about WA, as opposed to the Eastern States, and that is part of it, that sense of WA. But also we have got one paper and I think while this will change, we did have four TV stations who all had West Australian based staff, who were all interested in running Western Australian news stories, so our ability to use the media, I think, was greater than, our access to the media, was certainly much greater than it is the experience of unions in Melbourne and

Sydney because they are in a much more competitive market for competing for stories.

I think we have also been prepared to try things here in WA as a union movement that perhaps some of the other unions have been a bit more traditional and I think we have probably had a higher media profile, the union movement, than in some of the other states. I think we have got the advantage of GWN as well which is a very relatively cheap mechanism, and again, it has changed. GWN used to have weekend staff, they don't any more. So I can remember one of the protests that we had against the government down in Albany, where we had a sort of street protests, the whole shebang on a Saturday, that was covered, that got on GWN. That wouldn't happen now because GWN don't have any staff covering weekend events. They just take the news from Channel 7 and, I think, in the not too distant future, we are going to see here the decrease in locally based staff and it will be just be the feeds from the Eastern states. That means we are going to have change again in terms of we are not going to be able to use the media to get our message out as I think we have been relatively successful in doing over the last ten years.

The other thing I would just say, and this, I must say I hadn't really been conscious of until I was asked to assist in the supervision of a social work student, at Youth Accommodation in Vic Park last year. One of the things that she wanted to do was look at other ways other agencies dealt with the kind of problems that were confronting this agency. So I organised for this student to do a couple of days in Sharon Jackson's office as a politician and we were talking about that and analysing the experiences and the differences in approach. What really struck me was the total lack in the course and that then made me think, in the community generally, of the welfare rights approach.

The number, or the decrease in the number of activists advocate organisations because I was saying to her, "Well you



know, you should be being taught welfare rights.” and I used to teach it as a unit but there is very little kind of rights based teaching going on it seems in the social work schools but also, rights based groups. You know, I thought, “Mm.

Well where are they? Where are the housing advocacy groups? Where are the disability action groups? Where are the?” They are not there and that struck me as something that really is quite different, and is a change in WA, and I guess I hadn’t appreciated that until this experience of supervising a student six months ago because of the sort of the work with the union.

We are sort of out there advocating and I just hadn’t appreciated that whole community advocacy stuff. You know it seems to, if it hasn’t disappeared, it is suddenly a lot quieter than it used to be and I don’t know if that is because it is funding and they have all dried up or what has happened. But it really struck me during this placement that I was supervising last year.

DP It seems like there is a blossoming of talk about community development where perhaps during the nineties it was not as popular.

HC Yes.

DP Are you seeing changes or it much the same as the kind of community practice that you saw in the 1980s?

HC I think you are right in terms of that shift back to community, and I am looking at it in terms of perhaps working within the Labor party to look at how you can fund community organisations and you can’t go backwards. You can’t go back to what we had. So if you talk about childcare, for example, we used to fund community based childcare services and the private sector didn’t get any government funding and then when Keating was Prime Minister, we introduced a fee relief system.

That was based on parents income so regardless of whether your child was in a community centre or a private centre you got the fee relief and that is how centres, the community centres, survived. Now we have got a situation in childcare where the greatest, the majority of centres, are in fact owned and operated by corporate players and childcare is an absolute cash cow for them in terms of government money. So the dilemma is, “How do you provide government money, not to the corporates who are just using it for profit but actually to the community based childcare services?” and I think that has led to a debate, “How do you do that?” and one of the ways you do that is by funding the fostering of community and so you are seeing a childcare centre as being a potential, I mean it is not just community, I think the sense is also citizenship, that people are learning to be good citizens by participating in the management committee of their local community childcare centre. So maybe you can fund somehow that. If you look at the aged care area, a group that I have been involved in, we sort of got a bit carried away but we were speculating about, “How do you marry the issue of wanting to give people in aged care facilities rights? How do you empower them?” because a lot of aged care is actually for people having information about what services there are and how they get it and, “What is one way that you could do that?” And we basically came up with this idea of internet cafes based in nursing homes.

You know the idea, which sounds a bit far fetched, but if you actually use some government funding to foster internet cafes in nursing homes, you would actually be serving the purpose potentially of bringing community people into nursing homes and creating that aged care facility as a hub of activity for the local community. You are also providing the means by which you would empower the residents if you provided them with education and training so they knew how to access the internet and find out the information that they needed.



So I think there is kind of the potential for creative ideas, as I say most of my thinking has been around, “How can you have government funding going to facilitate community development in service areas where you have got a private sector that is making a profit and you

don’t want the government funding going into the shareholders, particularly shareholders profits. And so I think that is the kind of area of debate and it is one I am pleased that the Labor party is prepared to kind of get involved in.

I think it is also a counter to the sort of sense that people have of the 90’s and the focus on the individual and, you know, the whole work/family stuff and we have certainly been, from an industrial point of view, trying to broaden that to say, “It is not just about people’s family responsibilities in terms of, say childcare, it is actually about their participation in community activities.”

You know, you can’t get coaches for football clubs or brownie/scout leaders because people no longer work set hours so they don’t know whether they will have the time off in order to make that commitment to once a month or once a week leading the brownie pack. I mean that is an exaggeration but that is the sort of thing that we have been trying to raise and even things as relatively minor in terms of the community services, as donating blood, to say, “That is an important industrial right. The access to blood donor leave.” which the Libs have taken away. It is not an allowable matter in awards so you can’t, as a union, we no longer have that in our awards as something we can enforce and that is a very simple example of something that is a community kind of responsibility, that people feel strongly about, and that is what the Red Cross says, people, because of the pressures of work, no longer have the time to go and donate blood.

So I think there is, as I say from my particular involvements, it is two pronged, “How can we use the industrial sort of protec-

tions and particularly around work and family, you know work/life balance stuff, but also more particularly around government funding of services and how can you use that?” and I think that is where this issue of community, but also this sort of sense of citizenship and people being good citizens means having a community involvement, is building up.

DP **Helen, I thank you for letting us get to know about your involvement in community work. It has been a wonderful discussion and it has been terrific to talk to you about these things.**

HC I have enjoyed it. I am just sorry that I haven’t been able to give you more specific examples but I am happy to try and follow some of those up but you might find some of it in the papers.

End of interview