



Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network Newsletter

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Contents

1. The Social Service Practitioners Bill and the Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network
2. Introducing the Advocacy Network Coordinator
3. SSPAN webpage
4. Provincial Workshop Programme
5. Subscribe to the network

1. THE SOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONERS BILL AND THE SOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONERS ADVOCACY NETWORK

A number of new pieces of legislation affecting children have come into force in 2009, or are due to do so soon. These include the Sexual Offences Act, the Children's Act, and the Child Justice Bill (awaiting signature by the President to become an Act). These laws collectively will transform the shape of social services in South Africa. They have all been developed in line with the developmental model of social services outlined in the Department of Social Development's policy papers and require the delivery of a range of prevention and early intervention programmes, diversion programmes and community-based services such as the mentorship scheme for child-headed households. The legislation recognises that the full range of social service practitioners are required to deliver these services. For example the Children's Act defines the term "social service professional" to include 'a probation officer, development worker, child and youth care worker, youth worker, social auxiliary worker and social, security worker'. A "social workers" is defined separately. Other social service practitioners required by the new legislation include: Early childhood development practitioners, home based carers, psychologists, managers, administrators, and volunteers.

The prospect of multi-disciplinary teams working together to build integrated services that provide a continuum of care and support for families is truly exciting. However, there are many human resource challenges that may impede the implementation of the new Acts. Firstly, there is a critical shortage of all types of social service practitioners. Secondly, only those practitioners who are registered under the Social Service Professions Act of 1978 may perform functions under the Children's Act: Currently the only practitioners that can register are social workers and auxiliary social workers. Although, a professional board does exist under the SSP Act for child and youth care workers the regulations that are needed to enable them to be recognised and registered have not

yet been promulgated by the Minister of Social Development. Another challenge is stability, because of the scarcity of practitioners and the gap between government and NPO salaries. As a result, many practitioners resign from NPO positions in rural areas in order to work for the higher salaries offered by government. This contributes to the geographic inequality of access to services for children and families.

The Social Service Professions Act (no 110 of 1978) regulates professional practice and establishes the South African Council for Social Service Professionals (SACSSP). This Act will eventually be repealed by the new Social Service Professions Bill. The Bill was published for comment in the Government Gazette in January 2008. The purpose of the new Bill is to “advance social justice by promoting developmental social services”. To meet this aim it contains six chapters that define the categories of practitioner that are to be registered and deals with other matters such the requirements for registration, and disciplinary procedures. The Minister of Social Development is waiting for recommendations from the SACSSP on possible amendments to the January 2008 draft. Once these amendments are agreed upon, the Minister will table the revised draft in Parliament, where once again the Bill will be opened for public comment. It is likely that the Bill will be tabled in the second half of 2009, however, this is not certain as we cannot predict the priorities of the new government post the elections.

There are a number of sections of the Bill that need to be scrutinised and discussed by social service practitioners. A key concern is the categories of practitioner to be registered (section 1, and section 27). In the January 2008 gazetted draft bill, child and youth care workers were included as a recognised practitioner, however, in a revised draft of the Bill published on the SACSSP website later in 2008 the Council indicated that other approaches will also be considered. Comments in the margins of the Council draft indicate that one of the options being considered is to recognise only social workers with all other practitioners falling under the catch-all of other categories designated by the Minister. General requirements for registration are outlined in section 29.

The composition and powers of the Council are determined in the Bill in chapter 2. All practitioners groups should consider whether or not the composition will ensure that they are effectively represented and their interests taken into consideration. The current draft allows for three representatives from each Board, but they must be registered. Therefore, until such time as the registration process for child and youth care workers is completed they would not qualify. The Bill does make provision for two members to be co-opted to represent new constituencies, but there are a number of these constituencies e.g. community development workers, home based carers and early childhood development practitioners and therefore if there are only two co-opted positions some practitioner groups would not have representation on the Council.

A group of service providers, namely Childline, Child Welfare SA, National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), National Alliance for Street Children (NASC), the National Welfare Forum and

Disabled Children's Action Group (DICAG), recognised that it would be essential for social service practitioners to engage with the new legislation and advocate for improvements. Based on their experience of campaigning around the Children's Bill they wanted to harness their collective energies and approached the Children's Institute to coordinate activities. As a result, the Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network (SSPAN) was established in October 2008.

SSPAN aims to:

- Promote the participation of social service practitioners in the law-making process;
- Strengthen social service practitioners' networks and ensure that they have a co-ordinated response to the Social Service Professions Bill;
- Build relationships between social service practitioners, government departments and Parliament.

The network will do this by focusing on the following activities:

- Circulating discussion documents which explain the content of the Bill and outline possible amendments.
- Hosting workshops to discuss the content of the Bill and plan advocacy activities
- Sharing expertise on effective advocacy strategies
- Hiring legal experts to ensure that proposed amendments to the Bill are drafted in suitable legal formats
- Assisting sector representatives to prepare for and get to public hearings
- Monitoring parliamentary deliberations and sharing information on the debates by sending written updates or advising representatives.

2. INTRODUCING THE ADVOCACY NETWORK COORDINATOR



My name is Khululwa Seyisi. I have been appointed to the position of the Advocacy Network Coordinator by the Children's Institute, and my duties commenced on the 2nd February 2009. I come from a legal background; I am an admitted attorney and have practised on various areas of law for about 6 years. Prior taking this position I worked for Lawyers for Human Rights, in Durban, which is where my interest in advocacy and lobbying of decision makers was enhanced. I am very excited about the work I will doing and remain humbled by the successful track record of the Children's Institute in its advocacy programmes. I know I have much to learn from everyone I will be working with and look forward to healthy, good working relationships.

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Khululwa will work with Lucy Jamieson, the Senior Advocacy Coordinator at Children's Institute. Lucy has been involved with a number of advocacy campaigns to further children's rights, most notably the Children's Bill Working Group.

The Network is co-ordinated by a secretariat from the Children's Institute. The secretariat is overseen by a steering committee composed of representatives from Child Welfare South Africa, Childline South Africa; the Disabled Children's Action Group (DICAG); the National Alliance for Street Children; the National Alliance for Street Children (NASC); the National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers (NACCW); the National Early Childhood Development Alliance (NECDA), and the National Welfare Forum.

To contact the secretariat, please phone or e-mail:

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The Steering Group consists of various sub-groups, networks and individuals with different interests, skills, expertise and experience. If you have a detailed question on a particular aspect of the Bill, send an e-mail to Lucy, and she will forward it to the relevant expert for a response.

3. SSPAN WEBPAGE

A new section on the Children's Institute website hosts information relating to the Social Service Professions Bill and the Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network. This can be accessed at:

<http://ci.org.za/site/frames.asp?section=lawreform>

Pages developed:

Bills and Acts - all the legislation can be accessed here along with a short explanation of each version of the legislation.

About the advocacy network - this section gives a description of the aims of the project and lists founding members and some of the activities.

Resources – links to publications and other relevant materials.

Contact the network – contact details for key spokespeople.

Subscribe to progress updates – fax back form.

4. PROVINCIAL WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

The Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network (SSPAN) is working with the National Welfare Forum to ensure the participation of social service practitioners in the formulation of social service,

welfare and development policies. Children's Institute staff have designed a workshop to familiarise social service practitioners with the Social Service Professions Bill and discuss how they can get involved in the parliamentary process. The workshop will last approximately 6 hours (including one hour for lunch), and is split into the following components:

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

The schedule is as follows:

	March	April	May
Eastern Cape	17th - East London		
Free State	11th - Bloemfontein		
Gauteng	Gauteng Forum has its own programme.		
Kwazulu-Natal			13th - Durban (venue tbc)
Limpopo	Held in Feb		
Mpumalanga			6th - Nelspruit (venue tbc)
North West			27th - Mmbatho (venue tbc)
Northern Cape			29th - Upington (venue tbc)
Western Cape		1st - Overberg (venue tbc)	

5. SUBSCRIBE TO THE NETWORK

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

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

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