

**DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
AFTERNOON TEA TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF SCHOOL
SOCIAL WORK IN TASMANIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FRIDAY 4 OCTOBER 2024**

Good afternoon, everyone. I warmly welcome you all to Government House.

I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose land we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their deep connection to land, sea and waters.

Thank you all for being here today. It is an honour to be with you to celebrate this significant milestone of the 50th anniversary of social work as a service in Tasmanian public education.

This reception allows us to reflect on half a century of dedicated service and to acknowledge the critical role school social workers have played in shaping the future of our Tasmanian children and young people.

Social work as a service to schools is an important element of a healthy, functioning education system. Personal wellbeing of children enables them to engage with education, and to learn, grow and thrive.

This is translated into our Department's approach today. I quote:

*We know schools play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of children and young people, and when students feel valued, safe and supported they are in their best position to learn.*¹

The role of social work in our schools has evolved since after World War I, when four welfare workers were employed – three in the south of Tasmania and one in the north.

¹ <https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-frameworks/our-approach-to-wellbeing/>

They focused on truancy and reporting on ‘home circumstances.’ By the end of the 1960s there were seven welfare workers in Tasmania.

A major boost occurred in 1973 with the Federal Government Report, *Schools in Australia*, identifying and advocating for ‘additional materials and equipment, an increase in the provision of support staff such as speech therapists, social workers, guidance officers, and teacher aides ...’.²

Following this Report, the first five school social workers for Tasmania were appointed in 1974. In 1978, the welfare worker positions were phased out. Through the 1980s, position descriptions for social work were developed to include counselling and advocacy, with the requisite communication skills and ability to work within a multi-disciplinary team.

The original role of truancy officer has transformed to that of professional and tertiary accredited social work, underpinned with supporting student engagement and wellbeing.³

Today, there are over 130 school social workers in Tasmania, with one social worker for each school in the south.⁴

We know that mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress are on the rise. The advent of social media has created new forms of pressure, including online bullying.⁵

School social workers are more in demand than ever. Their work can often go unnoticed, as they work behind the scenes to provide counselling, crisis intervention or simply to ensure students have the opportunity for support.

May we acknowledge and celebrate this milestone of 50 years of school social workers in Tasmania. Congratulations and my thanks to everyone who has contributed to this program!

Now please enjoy your reception.

² Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, *Schools in Australia* (1973, pg 114).

³ Karen Medcraft (Senior Social Worker), *Speech to Inter-professional Conference* (2022).

⁴ Personal communication from Karen Medcraft (Senior Social Worker).

⁵ Personal communication from Karen Medcraft (Senior Social Worker).