

Tasmania Branch Social Work Symposium

Shaping What Comes Next: The Future of Tasmanian Social Work

Friday 11 September 2026 – Launceston Conference Centre

Event program

Time	Activity	Presenter
9:00am	Arrival, registration and light refreshments	
9:30am	Welcome, housekeeping and Welcome to Country	Ally Smith MC Melissa Carter
9:45am	Keynote address To Be or Not to Be - The Future of Our Profession	Elizabeth (Liz) Little, AASW National President
10:30am	Morning tea and networking	
11:00am	Keynote Q&A conversation Leadership, Learning and the Churchill Fellowship	Jody Bell, in conversation with Kit Speakman
12:00pm	Concurrent workshop session one (7 workshops)	
1:00pm	Lunch, networking and information displays	
1:45pm	Keynote address Disruptive Social Work Practice	Professor Shirley Ledger, University of Tasmania
2:30pm	Concurrent workshop session two (6 workshops)	
3:30pm	Reflections, acknowledgements and feedback	Ben McGregor MC

Welcome to Country

Melissa Carter

Melissa Carter is a direct descendant of the Pairrebeenne/Trawlwoolway clan whose family line descends from the Coastal Plains nation in northeast Tasmania as well as the Oyster Bay clan.

Melissa has been actively involved in her community and is a part of the planning for Mannalargenna Day, which is an annual cultural festival held on Country at Tebrakunna, Little Musselroe Bay. She is a member of a National First Nations Reference group for Positive Partnerships and provides consultation towards the professional and community resources that supports children who are on the autism spectrum.

Melissa currently works as a Senior Social Worker within the Community Health Team, which is a part of the Tasmanian Health Service. Within her role, Melissa supports inpatients and older residents in a regional hospital and an aged care facility. She is an emerging narrative therapist and supports people seeking to improve their person circumstances, mental health and wellbeing and the connections that they have within community.

Keynote presentations

To Be or Not to Be – The Future of Our Profession

Liz Little – AASW National President

Social work is navigating profound change, from increasing cost-of-living pressures and service-system complexity to climate change, workforce challenges, artificial intelligence and the ongoing fight for professional recognition. In this future-focused keynote, AASW National President Liz Little will explore what these challenges mean for social workers and for the profession more broadly. Rather than simply responding to increasingly strained systems, Liz will consider how social work can reclaim its role as a profession of advocacy, leadership and social change. She will explore the importance of sustaining the workforce, strengthening our collective professional voice, embracing First Nations-led practice and ensuring that the relational and human foundations of social work remain central as our practice environment evolves.

About the presenter

Liz is the National President of the AASW and has contributed to the association in a range of senior roles for more than a decade, including as Branch President of the Tasmanian Branch Management Committee from 2023-2025.

Keynote Q&A Conversation: Leadership, Learning and the Churchill Fellowship

Jody Bell – Social work leadership advisor and 2025 Churchill Fellow, in conversation with Kit Speakman, AASW Tasmania Branch Management Committee member.

Drawing on more than 65 conversations across nine countries during her Churchill Fellowship, Jody Bell will explore what helps social workers remain connected to their professional values and ethics as they move into leadership, particularly when organisational and system pressures pull in other directions.

Jody will share recurring patterns identified across individuals, teams, organisations, the profession and wider systems, including why leadership transition is so often left to chance and why the conditions surrounding leaders may matter as much as leadership training itself.

Through a Q&A conversation with Kit Speakman, the session will invite us to consider what these international insights might mean for the future of social work leadership in Tasmania, including rural and regional practice.

About Jody

Jody Bell is a social work leadership advisor and researcher with 35 years of experience spanning frontline practice, senior executive leadership and academia. A 2025 Churchill Fellow, her international research explored what helps aspiring and early-career social work leaders stay aligned with their values as they move into leadership.

Disruptive social work practice

Professor Shirley Ledger – Professor and Head of Social Work, University of Tasmania

What happens when social work becomes very good at doing what systems require, but loses sight of what the profession requires of us? Drawing on disruptive pedagogy and critical social work, Shirley Ledger explores the growing pull of compliance, technicism and managerialism and what it means for professional identity, practice and education. The keynote invites social workers to consider how we might create spaces for critical reflection, resistance and radical hope, and reclaim our capacity to disrupt what should not simply be accepted.

About the presenter

A social worker with 27 years' experience across practice, leadership and higher education, Shirley has worked in child protection, domestic and family violence, family law, young women's services and community development.

Concurrent workshop session one

12:10pm–12:55 pm – Seven concurrent 45-minute workshops

The N.E.R.V.E. Method™: Redefining Financial Wellbeing for Social Workers Through Trauma-Responsive Practice

Sonia Skewes – Accredited Social Worker / Integrative Therapist

Interactive – Reflective – Presentation with participant engagement

About the workshop

Financial stress is a major contemporary stressor, yet money is rarely named openly in social work. This interactive workshop introduces the N.E.R.V.E. Method™, a trauma-responsive framework for understanding financial stress at a body-based, root-cause level. Participants will explore the stages Name it, Explore it, Reveal the root, Validate and release, and Expand new pathways through somatic awareness, expressive activities, reframing and grounding. The session considers both practitioner wellbeing and client application, helping social workers recognise financial stress responses and understand why financial patterns can be resistant to logic alone. Participants will leave with practical tools, language shifts and a different way of approaching financial wellbeing.

About the presenter

Sonia Skewes is an Accredited Social Worker, trauma-responsive educator and founder of The N.E.R.V.E. Method™. Drawing on lived experience and evidence-informed education, she translates neuroscience and psychology into practical approaches that support resilience, confidence and sustainable wellbeing.

Leading Through Reflection: Cultivating a Culture of Critical Practice in Community Services

Ben McGregor – Quality and Practice Partner, Anglicare Tasmania

Reflective – Skills-based / practical

About the workshop

The community services sector is navigating increasing complexity, demand and change. This interactive workshop explores how reflective leadership can help leaders move beyond procedural responses and build cultures of critical, purposeful and sustainable practice. Through facilitated reflection, small-group discussion and practical exploration, participants will examine how assumptions, power, bias, emotional responses and organisational pressures influence decision-making, including the use of self in leadership. The session will also consider how reflective practice forums can be established within teams. Participants will leave with practical strategies for strengthening decision-making, workforce sustainability, inclusive leadership, accountability and person-centred service delivery.

About the presenter

Ben McGregor is the Quality and Practice Partner for Community Services at Anglicare Tasmania. With nearly two decades of experience across mental health, community services, practice oversight and governance, his work focuses on reflective leadership, service quality, workforce capability and sustainable practice.

Generative Artificial Intelligence in Social Work Practice

Dr Rebecca Featherston & Qaem Syed – Monash University / Department of Education

Interactive – Discussion-focused

About the workshop

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot are increasingly being used in social work, while guidance for ethical use remains limited or inconsistent. This interactive workshop asks: what does ethical use of generative AI look like in social work practice? Rebecca and Qaem will share research on how Australian social workers report using generative AI, consider existing ethical frameworks and lead discussion about the opportunities, risks and responsibilities that arise as these technologies become embedded in practice. Participants will leave with a stronger understanding of key ethical challenges and practical questions to consider when integrating generative AI into social work settings.

About the presenters

Dr Rebecca Featherston is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Monash University whose research includes critical thinking, cognitive bias, decision-making and the use of evidence and data science in social service systems. Qaem Syed holds a Master of Social Work from Monash University and has researched generative AI adoption in Australian social work practice; he currently works as a clinician with the Department of Education.

Mental State Examination and Risk Assessment: Building Confidence Through Practice

Rokhsar (Roxy) Hussain & Bridget Riely – Community Forensic Mental Health Service

Interactive – Reflective – Skills-based / practical – Discussion-focused

About the workshop

Mental health presentations occur across many areas of social work, yet practitioners can feel uncertain about conducting a Mental State Examination (MSE) and assessing risk. This practical workshop explores the key components of an MSE and their role in effective risk assessment and management. Drawing on community forensic mental health experience, participants will work through a realistic case scenario to identify indicators of mental ill-health, consider risk and protective factors and discuss appropriate responses. The workshop translates theory into everyday practice, including practical tips for communicating observations, documenting assessments and working with multidisciplinary teams. Participants will leave with greater confidence in structured clinical reasoning and mental health assessment.

About the presenters

Roxy Hussain is a social worker and case manager with experience across hospitals, youth and adult mental health, palliative care, renal services, alcohol and drug services, forensic mental health and private practice. Bridget Riely is a senior social worker and Clinical Lead with experience across community services, sexual assault, family violence, adult community mental health and forensic mental health.

Animals as Victim Survivors in Their Own Right – The Animal Experience of Family Violence

Jayla Sainty – Family Violence Project Officer, Huon Domestic Violence Service

Reflective – Discussion-focused – Presentation with audience engagement

About the workshop

This workshop explores the link between animal abuse, neglect and human violence, and the emerging field of animal-inclusive social work. Jayla will share the work of Huon Domestic Violence Service in developing a lived-experience co-designed Practice Guide on Animals in Family Violence, including animal-specific safety planning and risk assessment tools. Participants will consider how animals can be centred within family violence practice and hear about emerging One Welfare approaches and animal-inclusive initiatives across Australia. The session invites reflection on what future social work practice could look like when the experiences and safety of companion animals are recognised alongside those of people experiencing family and domestic violence.

About the presenter

Jayla Sainty (she/her) is a proud Palawa woman and an early-career social worker passionate about the experiences of both humans and animals affected by family and domestic violence. She advocates for women and children with companion animals and for stronger animal-inclusive responses across community and health services.

When the Professional Becomes Personal: Social Workers Recovering from Workplace Induced Mental Ill-Health

Dianna Atkins – Social Worker

Interactive – Presentation with audience engagement

About the workshop

Burnout, vicarious trauma, moral injury and workplace traumatic injury are known risks within social work, yet the experience of recovery can remain private and isolating. In this interactive presentation, Dianna draws on lived experience to explore the impact and recovery of workplace-induced mental ill-health. Participants will be invited to reflect on the challenges faced by social workers during recovery and to consider, through a critically reflective lens, how the profession can respond more effectively. The session seeks to move workplace-induced mental ill-health from the private sphere into professional discussion, strengthening awareness, research and responses for affected social workers.

About the presenter

Dianna Atkins BSW, MCouns, BA (Professional Honours - Human Services Practice) has more than 30 years' experience across health, education and community settings. Her practice has included child and adolescent mental health, perinatal mental health, neurological rehabilitation and hospital social work. She is now focused on recovery, healing and future research into workplace-induced mental ill-health among social workers.

Charlie, Dianna's assistance dog, will also be in the workshop room. Charlie will be working during the session, so attendees are asked not to approach or interact with him.

Rights Versus Rites: How Loss Translates Between the Deceased and the Living

Dr Margaret E Hughes & Melissa Carter – Social workers in private practice, health and community practice

Interactive – Reflective – Skills-based / practical – Discussion-focused

About the workshop

What rights do deceased people have, and can a deceased person be harmed? This workshop opens a rarely discussed area of social work practice: the ethical, pragmatic and social considerations of posthumous care. Margaret and Melissa explore the proposition that actions affecting a deceased person can also have significant consequences for the wellbeing, bereavement and cultural care of those who remain. The session invites participants to reflect on human rights, death rites and the role social workers can play in strengthening posthumous care and professional practice.

About the presenters

Dr Margaret E Hughes is a private social work consultant and part-time Tasmanian Health Service social worker with a particular interest in death, dying, grief, loss and bereavement. Melissa Carter is a Pairrebeene / Trawlwoolway woman from Trouwener (Tasmania) and works as a community health social worker in northern Tasmania.

Concurrent workshop session two

2:40pm–3:25pm – Six concurrent 45-minute workshops

Build a Career You Don't Need to Recover From

Jody Bell – Founder, Being Your Potential – 2025 Churchill Fellow

Interactive

About the workshop

Many skilled social workers step away from the profession just as they move into leadership, often without adequate preparation or support. Drawing on her 2025 Churchill Fellowship research across 14 international locations, Jody Bell shares what helps aspiring and early-career social work leaders remain aligned with their values. The workshop explores the value of confidential developmental space separate from performance management, the 'accidental leader' pattern and why leadership training often fails to transfer without reflective follow-up. Participants will consider how these findings translate to Tasmanian and rural contexts and identify practical starting points for supporting sustainable leadership across the social work career journey.

About the presenter

Jody Bell is a social worker with more than 35 years' experience across government, academic and community sectors and a 2025 Churchill Fellow. She is the founder of Being Your Potential, a social work leadership consultancy, and a sessional academic at Queensland University of Technology.

Supervisor Identity in Social Work: Shaping the Future of Supervision

Ally Smith – Accredited Social Work Supervisor – Director, Ally Smith Consulting

Interactive – Reflective – Skills-based / practical – Discussion-focused

About the workshop

Professional supervision is essential to ethical and effective social work practice, yet relatively little attention is given to developing the identity of the person providing supervision. Drawing on Master's research into professional supervision in Tasmania and extensive work with emerging and experienced supervisors, this interactive workshop introduces supervisor identity as a foundation for authentic, reflective and confident supervision. Participants will consider the influences that have shaped their approach, begin mapping an aspect of their supervisor identity and draft the beginnings of a Supervisor Identity Statement. The session concludes with one practical action participants can take to intentionally strengthen their supervision practice.

About the presenter

Ally Smith is an Accredited Social Work Supervisor, educator and director of Ally Smith Consulting. With more than 30 years' experience across leadership, management and direct practice, she now specialises in developing social work supervisors, with a focus on supervisor identity, reflective practice and ethical supervision.

Accounting for Complexity: Recognising and Resourcing Hidden Patient Care

Associate Professor Carrie Lethborg – St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne / University of Melbourne

Presentation with audience engagement

About the workshop

Health and human services are increasingly defined by complexity, with practitioners required to respond to intersecting clinical, psychological, social, cultural, legal and organisational needs. This workshop explores the proposition that social work's defining expertise is not care coordination, counselling or advocacy alone, but its capacity to make sense of human complexity across systems. Drawing on systems theory, emerging research into integrative care work and reflections from health practice and lived experience, participants will examine the capabilities that unite social work across diverse settings and consider how naming this expertise more confidently could strengthen the profession's identity, influence and future contribution.

About the presenter

Dr Carrie Lethborg is a social worker, health equity researcher and Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. Based at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, her research focuses on health equity, systems complexity, trauma-informed care and outcomes for people experiencing disadvantage. She has more than 30 years' experience across oncology, palliative care and hospital social work.

My Lived Experience in Peer Led Men's Groups

Gordon Roberts – Social Worker – TasMen volunteer

Interactive – Discussion-focused

About the workshop

Drawing on almost two decades of involvement in peer-led men's groups, Gordon introduces the principles and practices that support connection, reflection and mutual support among men. Participants will experience elements of a men's group, including grounding, check-in, group guidelines and reflective discussion, while considering how these practices foster trust, emotional safety and meaningful connection. The workshop also explores the relevance of men's groups to contemporary social work responses to social isolation, trauma and men's wellbeing. Participants will leave with a greater understanding of the TasMen approach and practical ideas that may be adapted within their own practice.

About the presenter

Gordon Roberts is a social worker with 25 years' experience in England and Australia across hospitals, community organisations, mental health and alcohol and drug services. Since 2007 he has been involved with TasMen men's groups, including leadership training and Care Team responsibilities, and he currently helps coordinate a private online men's group.

How to Build Health Practitioners Research Capacity: Turning What We See in Practice Into Evidence and Ideas That Can Shape Meaningful Change

Victoria Headlam – Accredited Mental Health Social Worker – Researcher

Presentation with audience engagement

About the workshop

Social workers are well placed to turn what they observe in practice into evidence that can improve services and systems, yet research confidence and organisational support can be significant barriers. Victoria's session explores what helps health practitioners build research capacity, capability and confidence, drawing on an umbrella review and current mixed-methods research within Tasmanian health systems and rural practice. Preliminary findings point to strong practitioner motivation alongside a need for greater visibility, integration, leadership and support for research. Participants will consider how practice questions can become research questions and how stronger research cultures can contribute to locally relevant, person-centred change.

About the presenter Victoria Headlam is a mental health social worker with experience across schools, community primary health, outreach services and private practice. Her experience living and working in coastal Tasmania informs a strong interest in rural practice, equitable access and innovative service delivery.

Beyond the Noise: Mastering Presence and Quieting the Inner Critic in Social Work Practice

Mark Lockyer – Accredited Mental Health Social Worker – Therapist and Counsellor

Interactive – Reflective – Skills-based / practical

About the workshop

Increasing professional demands can create psychological and emotional 'noise' that clouds judgement and diminishes presence. Drawing on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy principles, this workshop explores how social workers can notice internal noise, create space around it and remain grounded in the midst of professional intensity. Participants will be introduced to practical strategies for stepping into the role of the 'noticer', supporting greater clarity, intentional action and authentic engagement. The session provides space for reflection and offers portable approaches that can support practitioners to remain centred, focused and resilient as social work practice continues to evolve.

About the presenter

Mark Lockyer is an Accredited Mental Health Social Worker in private practice, specialising in telephone counselling for private clients and Employee Assistance Programs. He uses Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to support sustainable practice, clarity and presence in professional and personal life.