

Publication Reference:
Lang, M. (1984). President's Report. Victorian Association of Family Therapists Newsletter, April ed., 7-10.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT - V.A.F.T. A.G.M. 1984

In August, at Trawalla, there was a joint meeting with the College of G.P.'s - this in itself is an important step. The presentation was by Austin Hospital Family Therapy trainees who told of some engaging cases dealing with psychosomatic families.

In September a pre-conference meeting was held at which people unable to attend the conference were able to hear some of the presentations. This also gave the presenters a practice run.

In November, at the Queen Victoria Medical Centre, David Mushin and Brian Stagoll presented a complex and interesting "success story" of a family they saw live in front of a group of paediatricians.

In December, the Melbourne Group of Women and Family Therapy presented "Feminism and Family Therapy". I was not present, being overseas, but, by all accounts, this evoked much discussion and debate. Personally, I wish to plea for more presentations and discussions of this subject.

Helm Stierlin's Visit to Melbourne was particularly successful. Attendance was good. His interviewing was skilful and his

theoretical presentation stimulating. He drew attention to the chronically ill and this was particularly welcome.

The newsletter made its regular appearance and kept us well informed. It is with regret that we were unable to find someone to help Margaret Goding with this and thus the whole burden of its publication fell on her. For this we are grateful.

I note with satisfaction that a number of Family Therapy training programmes are being offered at Marriage Guidance, Melbourne Family Therapy centre, Austin Hospital as well as W.R.F.T.C. and Bouverie.

The link between membership of V.A.F.T. and subscription to the journal is now established so that your 1984 membership fee entitles you to Vol. 5 No. 1-4. The journal has formally invited the V.A.F.T. to appoint a person to serve on the editorial board. The outgoing executive has called for nominations of such a person and the incoming executive will need to finalise this matter.

Next year the V.A.F.T. will host the National Family Therapy conference for the second time (this is in contrast to the Adelaide and Sydney conferences which were organised by appointed committees rather than by the State Associations.)

During 1983 the formation of a national body of Family therapists was raised again. The V.A.F.T. executive welcomed closer collaboration between the States with free and regular flow of information but, to create a formal national body seems unwarranted and would involve unnecessary effort and expense.

Since the inception of the V.A.F.T. there have been differences of opinion regarding the ease of granting membership. Some want the Association primarily as an interest group, whilst others wish it to be mainly an accreditation body with strict criteria for membership.

The membership committee has proposed guidelines for membership application. The proposal was accepted by the executive. Some of the executive believe that these by-laws merely clarify the criteria for membership that always existed, others think that it represents a toughening of the requirements.

Some discussions on how exclusive and difficult membership should be made is necessary because it is a central issue to the future of this organisation.

Personally, I regret the introduction of this by-law which makes membership more exclusive. I would like the V.A.F.T. to welcome most people who wish to join and not be overconcerned about criteria. There is only one good reason for tough accreditation procedures viz an attempt to secure rebates for members or, if it enhances members job applications. As the former is unlikely, we seem to be erecting a high wall for no good reason.

The proposed criteria for membership is primarily concerned with quality (of hours of training and supervision), not its quantity, (i.e. its content, relevance, adequacy etc.)

This raises another question, this is, should the V.A.F.T. examine and approve the various training programmes or leave things as they are - that is, any training offered by V.A.F.T. members is O.K. (In contrast the V.A.P. runs its own training programme.)

In turn this raises another dilemma - the V.A.F.T.'s relation to the clinics and centres where family therapy is practised. For instance W.R.F.T.C. accepted the invitation of the A.I.F.T., via Max Cornwall, to sponsor the Victorian leg of Cecchin and Boscolo's visit to Australia. Some people feel that such activities should come under the jurisdiction of the V.A.F.T., whilst others believe it is equally appropriate for the various centres to promote family therapy using their own initiative and judgement. Then again, should the V.A.F.T. deal with complaints that any individual, colleague or client, may have against a clinic or, indeed, member.

The V.A.F.T.'s attempt to avert the relocation of Bouverie failed. Probably, some believe this is to be a serious setback, others, including myself, see it as unfortunate in some respects, but also as offering significant opportunities and challenges.

I have been closely involved with the V.A.F.T. from before it even existed. Since its inception I was firstly convenor of the scientific programme and then president for the past two years. I have decided not to stand for office but wish to take it easy and be an ordinary member, attend meetings when I wish and have more time to write, do clinical work and teach, travel and play tennis.

The first secretary, president and treasurer of the V.A.F.T. were male psychiatrists. My election as president was an important break in this tradition in that the position was filled for the first time by a para medic. However, none of these executive positions have as yet been held by a woman. This is regrettable, particularly in view of the fact that the majority of members are women.

During the years there has been a steady reduction in the number of psychiatrists on the executive and attending our scientific meetings. A decreasing involvement by psychiatrists in our organization would be most unfortunate. The simple fact is the medical profession controls the health services in Australia and without their co-operation and support, family therapy would be in trouble.

Later on we will be electing new office bearers. I wonder if it would be appropriate to ask the nominees to say a few words on their ideas and proposals. In this way we could vote, not only for the person, but also for a platform.

It is my pleasure to thank the outgoing executive. Andrew has now had the onerous job of treasurer since the V.A.F.T. began and in spite of his anxiety, or perhaps because of it, we are still in a healthy financial position.

Jim has been our foreign minister for a number of years. With his capable and diplomatic touch we have had a number of successful overseas visitors - having been recently indirectly involved in

negotiations to bring the Milan group, I know how frustrating and difficult it can be. He will not be standing for office as he is leaving for Perth to head their Marriage Guidance Council. We wish him all the best.

Margaret also will not be standing for office and for her dedication and, at times, thankless task of getting out the newsletter - again thank you.

To Anita, Barbara, Jim and Geoff for a rich and innovative year of scientific programmes, many thanks.

To Patrick, Alan and Anne, thank you for doing the difficult job of dealing with membership issues.

We have created a new portfolio this year, i.e. of "Associates". It was most energetically looked after by Anne. She will not be able to continue with this portfolio as she has been accepted as a full member, welcome.

To Tom for his conscientious secretarial work and his careful recording of some impossible meetings and discussions, my grateful thanks.

The executive exercised its prerogative and invited Geoff to join us. I understand that he is now going to take it easier and spend more time at Lake Tyers and will not be so actively involved. In recognition of his long standing and outstanding contribution to this organisation, as well as to family therapy in general, health delivery and the provision of training opportunities to so many of us, the executive decided to recommend to the A.G.M. to make Geoff our first life member. (This recommendation was unanimously accepted.) Finally, perhaps it is most important to ensure that the energy spent in maintaining the V.A.F.T. is not so all consuming that there is not sufficient energy left to do the work that we are trained for and for which this organisation was set up - namely, mutual support and exchange of ideas, the promotion of family therapy and making our services available to those who need it.

MOSHE LANG
Williams Road Family Therapy Centre

8th March, 1984.
