

Celebrating

**Child & Youth
Care Work**

40 **years**



NACCCW

Advocacy

Development

Professionalism

**20th Biennial
Conference**



Celebrations and blessings in abundance at the NACCW 20th Biennial Conference

By Merle Allsopp

The NACCW 20th Biennial Conference can surely be considered to have been an outstanding success. Hosted at Cape Town's International Convention Center, in unusually luxurious surroundings (thanks to the generosity of the Center's management) the event held a dignified sense of occasion. Being able to celebrate the 40th birthday of the NACCW in one of the best settings the country has to offer was a fitting privilege. The center's magnificence reflected the sense that the profession has grown up and has come of age. The Western Cape Conference Planning Committee is to be commended for having secured so beautiful a venue for celebrating this milestone – and for hosting the event so efficiently, courteously and professionally. The blessings associated with this celebratory event were many. We had present 1163 adult delegates, and 142 youth delegates – making this a sizable event by any standards.

We were particularly blessed to have 83 international delegates from 11 countries present with us adding a very special tone to conference. So many people had travelled so far to be with the South African child and youth care field at this special event! This raised the

status of the occasion to being almost that of an international rather than a national conference! It was very fitting to have present with us a large Canadian contingent (including some old friends of the NACCW), since Canadian writing and expertise has been an essential ingredient in our growth. Present too was a strong African delegation from 4 countries, partners who see the importance of developing a child-focused workforce to support Africa's children. We were also blessed by the presence of funders including representatives of the Swedish Adoptionscentrum, USAID, UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as by the attendance of representatives from FICE International. This signified the NACCW's connection into a broader, global network aimed at optimising services to vulnerable children, a connection that has spurred our growth in the two decades of democracy.

Not only were we blessed with many NGO representatives, but the Department of Social Development also attended in significant numbers. A large delegation from almost every province was present, as well as from the national office, demonstrating the importance of cordial partnerships between

government and civil society in building services to children. Having Minister Bathebele Dlamini present for an entire day at conference was an extraordinary blessing, and shows the commitment of the Minister of Social Development to child and youth care work.

As usual at NACCW conferences, it was the youth who stole the show! This year we hosted a record number of youth people – another extraordinary blessing. The presentation by the young people was slick, professional, and left no one in any doubt that the future of our country is in good hands as vulnerable and at-risk young people strengthen their resilience and their voices.

We were also able to thank those who have led us to this point, acknowledging past leaders, and recognizing the importance of the contributions of so many in getting us to this point. Present was Ernie Nightingale, the NACCW's first Chairperson, as well as all the past Chairpersons. And, in a private event, Brian Gannon, hailed as a key founder and the first Director of the NACCW, was blanketed in honor of his vision in creating this extraordinary network. ■

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Contents

Child and Youth Care Work | Volume 33 No. 3
Quarter 3 & 4 | 2015

Editorial Merle Allsopp	2
The Impact of Child and Youth Care Work: How We Make a Difference in the Lives of Children, Youth, Families and Communities Prof. Jim Anglin	4
Message from FICE International Rolph Widmer	10
Adoptionscentrum Sweden Sends Good Wishes for Conference	12
Making Moments Meaningful: Therapeutic Child and Youth Care Practice Thom Garfat	14
Tertiary Education in Child and Youth Care Work Professor Puckree	16
Address by Representative of the South African Council for Social Service Professions Ms Aziwe Magida	20
Past Director sends Good Wishes to NACCW Conference 2015 Lesley du Toit	23
Address by the Honourable Minister of Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini	24
South Africa is Indebted to the Isibindi Programme Press Statement	30
Celebrating the Voices of YOUth	32
Some Highlights from NACCW 20th Biennial Conference	38
Child and Youth Care Work Webcast	40

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