

THE BLACK SASH ADVICE OFFICE

5 LONG STREET MOWBRAY 7700 TEL: 689-3150 FAX: 685-7510

Cape Western

MOWBRAY ADVICE OFFICE

January to December

'92

Co-Ordinator's report

OFFICE HOURS: MONDAY - THURSDAY 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. • 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. CLOSED ON FRIDAYS

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE BLACK SASH AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

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ADVICE OFFICE COMMITTEE:

Mary Burton	
Thisbe Clegg	Treasurer and Bookkeeper
Betty Davenport	Chairperson
Jenny de Tolly	
Anne Greenwell	Monitoring rep
Carol Lamb	Regional Council rep
Sue Philcox	
Noel Robb	

(All paid AO staff are also on ACom)

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (FOR THE REGION):

Thisbe Glegg	Advice Office Treasurer and Chairperson
Betty Davenport	Advice Office rep
Jenny de Tolly	National Executive rep
Dot Erlank	Regional Treasurer
Sue Joynt	National Treasurer
Carol Lamb	Regional Council rep
Sue Philcox	Advice Office Trust rep

(One paid staff rep also on MCom)

CASEWORKERS

Sue Cooke	Muriel Crewe
Betty Davenport ("floater")	Val Goldschmit
Roma Gottlieb	Beulah Greshoff
Claire Harkin	Joan Kilner
Bastienne Klein	Mary Livingston
Glynne Potts	Noel Robb
Caroline Taylor	Esther Zwarenstein

* Some joined during the course of the year, and some left before the end of the year.

* Paid Staff *

Sally Andrew	Training Co-Ordinator (half time)* left end Oct
Paula Cardoso	Monitoring/Assistant AO Co-Ordinator (half time)
Nomthandazo Gaqa	Karoo advice and fieldworker
Annemarie Hendrikz	Advice Office Co-Ordinator
Nomahlube Nabe	Senior Caseworker
David Viti	Caseworker (part time)
	and
Nikelwa Tengimfene	World University Services (WUS) 12 month trainee placement

 NUMBER OF CASES FOR YEAR '92

W. C. A.	126
TAX	12
SECURITY GUARDS	1 +
PENSIONS (STATE OAP)	467
(PRIVATE)	468 (more than 2 x '91)
DISABILITY GRANTS	321
FOSTER CARE "	45
MAINTENANCE "	246
PATERNAL MAINTENANCE (NON SUPPORT)	252
M. V. A.	118
MEDICAL	8
LEGAL	55
LABOUR	
* ASSAULT AT WORK	31
* BANKRUPTCY	1
* DISMISSAL	176
* DOMESTIC WORKER	26 (ex referrals to unions)
* RETRENCHMENT	84
* UIF	312
* WAGES	179
INSURANCE	115
I. D. DOCUMENTS	70 (68 in 2nd half of year)
HOUSING	104
FRAUD	82
FAMILY (INCL. DIVORCE)	81 (4 x '91)
DESTITUTION	107 (slightly less than '91)
CONSUMER	23
UNCLASSIFIED (e.g. lost parcel, dates, child death enquiry, bail refund, psychological distress, etc)	112
CRISIS COMMITTEE FOLLOW-UP WITH CPA approx:	200 * (state grants)
RURAL	36 *
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TOTAL:	3858 (to 2305 of '91 = 67% up)

OF WHICH, excluding * these last-mentioned two categories:

1920 = NEW CASES = 53 %	1702 = OLD CASES = 47 %
1536 = WOMEN = 42 %	2086 = MEN = 58 %

ALSO excluding * these two categories, total of State Welfare Grants cases were almost double those in '91 : 551 and this year's total of 809 Labour related cases is more than double '91 : 334.

+Security guards are classified under presenting problem but we try to sustain a system of multiple categorisation on our files.

INTRODUCTION

A year of gains and new ground

DESPITE spiralling retrenchments and swelling unemployment, union membership continued to grow this year. According to labour consultancy Andrew Levy and Associates' annual report, there are now **3,2-million**

Growth was stemmed by 100 000 retrenchments in the four major sectors alone. About 40 percent of the economically active population —

5,4-million — is unemployed.

organised workers in the country.

(my emphasis)

Ferial Haffajee

Weekly Mail: December 18 to 22, '92 (pp 16)

When I read this article I was struck by several connections to the advice office. As more and more people become unemployed, not a stone is left unturned in the search for money that is (or was) lawfully theirs; in ever greater numbers they come to our office with, for example, hopelessly outdated W.C.A. or UIF claims. On the other hand, organised workers are gaining greater awareness of their rights, and are no longer accepting working conditions in which they have no say, or which contravene the law; they might bring to us retrenchment packages, written warnings or even share certificates for scrutiny. So I was also struck by the contrasts neatly tucked away inside the above figures, because contrast was in many ways a characteristic of Mowbray Advice Office work during '93.

Our numbers increased considerably, indicating the mounting difficulties faced by marginalised people in our society. Yet paradoxically, we were pleased; we felt more worthy.

With the numbers came a growing awareness of the importance of the maintaining the quality of case-work. In the process of working on this, we came face to face with some of the attitude changes required of us. As we reached toward development on this fundamental level, we often felt our self-confidence crumbling, sometimes even to a point of panic. And yet this sensitised us on the spot to emotions of powerlessness and inadequacy (which must be a daily experience for many advice seekers) far more vividly than intellectual conceptualisation ever could.

Three new members of staff, in entirely new posts (and a new, now full-time advice office co-ordinator) expanded the scope of our work significantly. Yet the lack of experience of all of us, coupled with a need to set course in uncharted seas, resulted in much, time-consuming confusion, unexpected collisions and lost voices in the mist. But, our

(also new) management committee responded with increasing supportiveness and guidance, and thereby realised far more of it's potential than it might have done had we all been super efficient.

Our involvement with mothers engaged in the ongoing battle to get adequate financial support for their children, made us increasingly aware of the complexities of this issue, particularly if viewed in an eco-feminist human rights landscape.

More of the same problems that came to our notice last year around the rights finally won by "africans" to own property, and in some cases to qualify for housing subsidies, highlighted again that these may be questionable advantages in certain circumstances.

Even for me personally the contrast between years of rural fieldwork and the co-ordinating role, made the adjustment difficult. The sameness of each working day now, with an inset kaleidoscope of constantly changing demands on me, leaves little time for reflection and hardly any scope for day to day forward planning. I do not yet have the wisdom in the job to know what to do about this. But Sue van der Merwe had left behind sound practices and a great team - experienced, willing to adapt, endlessly patient and calm.

There were many gaps, particularly in research, analysis and campaign work. Our Management Committee (and with particular thanks to Jenny de Tolly and Thisbe Clegg, who respectively, chaired the group and individual assessments) took us through quite a rigorous assessment and forward planning process at the end of the year. This helped us pinpoint both "failures" and "achievements", leaving us better equipped to approach '93 more constructively.

So, one way and another, despite or because of the contrasts, it was indeed "a year of gains and new ground".

WELFARE GRANTS

These continue to constitute the bulk of our work. Incorrect ID numbers, rural double payments and particularly the debacle about the reviews early in the year had us banging loudly on the Home Affairs and CPA doors. Because of the future elections, ID documents moved appropriately and urgently onto the National Executive's agenda, and Karin Chubb's excellent work in this regard will no doubt be reflected in their report. June Crichton of the Port Elizabeth advice office was a ferocious and tenacious force and soon had the full attention of the highest levels of the CPA on the pensions issue. This is fully recorded by their office. We all benefited from the path you cleared for us June. Thank you.

The review crisis was awful. At Cape Town paypoints which we monitored there were well over 800 people per day waiting to have reviews done. The

 situation led to an SABC TV documentary by Barbara Foliesher which really ruffled official feathers, but did get them cracking on fixing things. (Need one add that "white" old age pensioners were not affected by the crisis, and continued to receive pensions as usual.)

The intense interactions with the CPA did eventually make our general relationship with them more amicable and effective. However, there are still serious problems which are causing a great deal of suffering. Many children are affected, and there is no doubt that the effects of this clumsy bureaucracy will reverberate for generations to come.

Betty Davenport and Nikelwa Tengimfene attended regular monthly meetings as members of the Pensioners Crisis Committee (which later in the year extended its brief to cover Maintenance Grants as well). This forum consists of township pensioners' committees, civics, ANC welfare section, and the CPOA (organisation for the aged) and was an excellent communication and activist forum.

Case History:

The Trials of Ms A.M.

- Aug 25: MG received since June '88 stopped after May '92 review. Child is 18, in standard 9. Ms V of CPA says she is too old.
- Aug 27: Mr P of CPA (more senior) says renew application.
- Sep 8: Ms T of CPA says child too old
- Sep 10: Mr S of CPA confirms grant should be paid if child has chance to matriculate before 21 - need motivation. Done.
- Oct 1: Ms V of CPA - no payment approved yet.
- Oct 6: Mr J (Mr S not available) of CPA promises to look into case.
- Oct 7: Mr S of CPA says fax will confirm that money is coming. No fax.
- Oct 13: Ms V of CPA says not entitled to grant. Application cancelled.
- Oct 16: Mr S of CPA says is entitled to grant: computer programme being changed; needs 2 to 3 weeks
- Nov 3: Ms V of CPA says no money yet according to computer, and she has received no ruling to approve: they will phone back the next day: they do not
- Nov 10: Mr J says nothing on computer yet: phone Mr S - he says they are "doing it now" and it will be paid out that month if all files in order: phones back to advise that CPA needs report from Principal to say child is a good student - must be received within 3 days
- Nov 11: Letter from Principal faxed to CPA
- Nov 17: Phone Mr S who says everything sorted out; payment in December.
- Jan 12: Ms A.M. reports that when she went to her paypoint in Gugulethu in '93 December, she was told there was no money. Phone Ms H of CPA who advises that payment was made in another township (Langa) and that Ms.A.M. must go there next month and collect the R890 that is due.
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Although not a particularly dramatic case, the "trials of Ms A. M." provides a classic example of the confusion that prevails in many of the administrative sections of the CPA, and which gives rise to so much

misinformation. It is difficult to imagine how Ms A.M. would have worked her way through this bog without the intervention of the caseworkers. And in this case as well as the next one, it is difficult to imagine how these women and their children survive.

Case History

Ms M suffered even worse frustrations. She first came to our offices on 28 October '91, saying that she had applied for a Maintenance Grant in March of that year, using her old reference book number, and getting a receipt with an incorrectly recorded number (which she could not read).

At first Mr N of CPA had told her to phone to find out a payment date, because the money had been approved. When she phoned he had told her there was a mistake on her ID and she wouldn't get any money. When our caseworker phoned (giving right and wrong numbers) the CPA couldn't find the file; the next day Mr N said Ms M must go to the paypoint in Jan/Feb of the following year, and get her money. When in March she had still received nothing, the CPA said there was no trace of her application; she therefore re-applied later that week, again at Mr N's counter. (By now she had a new ID book) In June she had still received nothing, and the CPA again said they had no record of her application. This continued for the next 4 months, with persistent follow-up from our side. Eventually, in September, Ms V of CPA phoned to say the birth certificates of the children had been misplaced, but now found, and Ms M would receive R4,122 over and above her normal grant in November, more than 18 months after her original application.

This was one of several cases that prompted us to write a formal letter of complaint about this particular CPA official, Mr N. At the time of writing we are still waiting for a response from the Director General. It was also a case that showed up the hopelessly inadequate emergency provision for deserving causes. We managed to get some assistance from Quakers, and also a food parcel slip from the CPA, but there is no way Ms M would have been connected to even these meagre resources without intervention.

Case History

Mr S first came to our office in May '89, seeking some sort of financial relief. He has no fingers and no toes. He claimed that the doctors refused to approve a Disability Grant because he did have "hands". He did manage to get some foodparcels from time to time. Some of the excuses given to us each time a caseworker enquired on his behalf, included that he was unco-operative, refused to sign documents when asked to, and couldn't be given a grant because he had no thumb with which to make a thumb print, and they didn't want to embarrass him by asking him to remove his shoes and make a toe print. (If they had, they would have realised he had no toe print either)

In November '92 more than 2 years later, he received a sum of R1755. We queried this as there was a receipt of application on file which was more than a year old, and we hope that he has by now received the balance due.

The question of who is disabled "enough" to receive a DG remains a vexing one. We looked at the Welfare issue at our Advice Office conference in September; these and many other cases convince us that the proposal there that we "should start campaigning with others for a dole system to be introduced and phased in by starting with all those who are over 50 years and unemployed to continue until they find a job or reach pensionable age" (Alpha minutes) should be a priority for '93.

PATERNAL MAINTENANCE

In the Western Cape, the Dept of Home Affairs still administers the required procedures on behalf of the Dept of Justice, but the possibility of the Dept of Justice taking over "is being investigated". In the meantime, we believe there is a tendency for both departments to "pass the buck".

Case History

Mr D asked us to assist him in getting a reduction on the R160 he had been ordered to pay for both of his children because this was straining his resources (salary R506). Furthermore, he did not believe that he should be paying for both children because he paid a damages claim of R500 (the equivalent of five head of cattle in Transkei in '85) to the mother's parents, and in terms of the Transkei Authorities Act No 4 of '65 he was not liable for any further maintenance for this child. (We did not "negotiate with the Home Affairs Department" on his behalf, as we were asked to do by the Consul General: Transkei Consulate - we simply advised Mr D to go to Home Affairs and discuss it with them himself)

This is the only '92 paternal maintenance case where we were approached by the father. However, through discussions with mothers we are aware of some of the perceptions of fathers; many of them think the women waste maintenance money on make-up and other frivolities; they would prefer to have the children with them if they must maintain them (but will invariably then pass them on to another woman - mother, sister, aunt, etc - to care for); they'll pay maintenance if the mother would still be available for wifely duties, and in general their interest in the child seems to exist in direct proportion to the amount of power they have over the woman and the child.

Case History

Ms M separated from her husband in '86, and for about a year he helped with child support - then nothing. She tried to get paternal maintenance through the official channels with no success. When Ms M came to our office in Nov '90, the Dept. of Home Affairs told us that a warrant had been issued for father's arrest, and that Ms M must contact them at the end of

the month. She did, and continued going back until April '91 when she returned to our office. Home Affairs advised that the SAP couldn't issue the warrant of arrest because they couldn't find the father. Dept. of Home Affairs gave no further advice or assistance. We tried to contact father through Radio Xhosa. After four months Home Affairs still gave the same answer.

We advised Ms M to apply for a state MG, which she did (now through the CPA) in May '91; she was given no proof of the application and the social workers sent her to SAP to sign a form to swear that she didn't know where the father was; this form was given to social workers (it took her over a week, being there each day, to have this stage of the process finalised)

Five months later when she came back, still having received nothing, the Dept of Home Affairs said she must come back and see them, and we also gave her a letter to take to Mr P at the CPA the following day (all officials were at a seminar on the day in question). A week later she had still received nothing, and had been told to go back to the CPA a week later. When we asked them the reason for this, we were told that she didn't see the right person, and that she must get the form from the SAP and take it to them. Another two months go by, with unkept promises from CPA officials that they would advise us when the grant would be payable.

In August '92 (15 months after her application) Ms M received back pay of R6,685, and monthly maintenance grant commenced. When she first came to our office her children were 15, 13, 10 and 5 years old. More than five years have gone by since Ms M has had any assistance in supporting these four children. And what of their father ?

Solidarity work

Quite early in the year Nomahlube Nabe took over the Non-Support issue from David Viti. It seemed more appropriate for a woman to be handling the issue, and we needed to do some active paypoint monitoring.

Noma started networking the various small groups of women that brought their support problems to us, or were referred to us by for example, the UCT legal clinic. She made contact with Sandra Burman (who had - together with a group calling themselves "Vukani Makosikaze" - produced a video workshop package on paternal maintenance), and Lawyers for Human Rights. We joined them in monthly Sunday afternoon workshops in the townships, and started to involve contact women from each of the major "african" townships. We monitored conditions at the paypoints. We joined a delegation taking a list of demands to the Dept of Home Affairs. Noma contacted SABC TV, and co-ordinated a two day filming and interview session for AGENDA (at the time of writing the programme still hasn't appeared - the director tells us it's on hold pending the public release of a Dept of Justice pamphlet which was mentioned by them on film)

It has not been easy. Most women are so drained of energy by the process of trying to get maintenance, and being single parents in most cases, that they have little scope to involve themselves in organising - particularly once their case has been successful.

 Involving the women who are themselves personally affected thus slows down the campaign potential; but it is their issue too, and it's essential to work together in finding our way through the maze.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the matter of parental child support gets ever more problematic as the issues surface. Central to this is the fact that by our efforts on their behalf in the Non-Support cases, we continue to lock women into their role of childminder. Is there an option?

Although not linked only to Paternal/Maternal Maintenance, this seemed an appropriate heading under which to name a few other factors and questions that have given us cause for thought this year.

Child abuse is on the increase. Like abuse of women, it seems to know no race, class, or cultural/religious boundaries. Although most known child-abusers are men, women also abuse children. In contemporary society (as in dark past ages), people are caring less about children, and are not beyond using them for immediate financial gain - by no means limited to those who one might think are "driven to it by poverty"; increasing use of children for pornographic and drug-running purposes is squarely in the terrain of the (mostly) very wealthy.

Should one be lobbying for child-support through the state, for which we could all be taxed? How would this affect parents' sense of responsibility? How would it affect population growth and its ecological, and more specifically political, aspects? Should child-support be channelled through a parent who might not use it to the child's advantage? How is that parent chosen if they are not together? Should it be channelled "directly" to the child through state structures infamous for their incompetence, bias and corruption? What are the implications for Health Care and Education, to name but two related issues.

HOUSING

Cases include people coming to us about inadequate maintenance of council houses, rent and service problems, desperate searches for accommodation, and ownership disputes. The case history we have chosen deals with bonds and subsidies. In '91 Noel Robb wrote to the press "Black home-owners get scandalous deal" and this matter is recorded in Sue van der Merwe's '91 report; our case (also taken up by Noel) is a variation on the theme.

Case History

Mr D had been employed by the CPA, where he became eligible for a subsidy and bought a house in '88 with a registered loan amount of R44,000. His monthly wage was R617, and his subsidy R537. Monthly repayments on the home loan with the PERM were R768. In '89 he, and his salary package were transferred to the Ikapa town council. In April '92 he was retired by Ikapa (retirement age 60) on a pension of R110 per month, and his subsidy immediately ceased.

When Mr D came to us in October the outstanding amount on the loan was R47 251,11. His last payment had been in June, the PERM had taken legal action. In reponse to our enquiry the PERM agreed to consider a minimum monthly repayment of R845, PLUS an amount to reduce the arrears. They further advised that "in terms of the Perms lending policy, we would not have prejudiced an 'elderly' applicant, assuming that his employer had investigated his 'retirement package' and issued him with documentation qualifying him for a Housing Loan Subsidy and Guarantee." As far as we could make out the Perm had not interviewed Mr D.

The CPA writes "It is most unfortunate that Mr D had to retire before he could fully redeem his bond, however, the choice to buy a home or not to do so, lies solely with the employee and at most, it could be argued that the Ikapa officials, as well as the Perm, should have advised Mr D against buying property at such a late stage in his life. The Ikapa Town Council would, however, not have had the right to refuse Mr D a subsidy while he was employed by the council.....It is also important to note that no employer in the public or private sector would be willing to subsidise somebody who has retired from the service." (Mr D secured the loan and bought the house whilst employed by CPA, not Ikapa.)

The CPA further advised us that they have no particular programme of education for first time home buyers, even when these are black people who have been denied this perk for many years and often have a different cultural concept of land ownership to that which informs the dominating legal practice. We could therefore only inform Mr D of his three basic options: sell the house himself and possibly make a profit; let the PERM repossess and sell, leaving him possibly still in debt to the PERM; continue payments (by getting tenants or whatever)

Thought-provoking, especially when read in the context of an article by Moses Mayikiso (SANCO President) in the Weekly Mail of January 15 to 21 of '93, in response to a Business Day article on bank "redlining" by Tony Norton.

"Banks' (redlining) policies today prevent people from selling homes in the same black areas where, in the late 1980s, they were enthusiastically granted loans. As a result there is no secondary sales market to speak of, and so banks are putting at risk the several billion rand they earlier sunk into the townships".....not to mention putting at risk the smaller, but probably more critical amount that the homeowners "sunk into the townships".

COMMUNICATION

Colesburg:

Noma was mandated to maintain weekly telephonic contact with Thandi Gaqa throughout the year and Thandi came to Cape Town on a more or less regular basis every two months, to attend the Rural Advice Training forum (RAT) meetings, and the Advice Office Committee meetings.

David, Nikelwa, Noma and I, as well as Anne Hill as the Regional Council rep travelled to Colesburg for a two day visit, and Advice Office Committee meeting, in October. We were thus able to experience first-hand one of the rounds of CPA/local authority/Civic association mediation sessions which Thandi and Les Osier (the only Black Sash member in the area) had initiated (with a bit of practical, local between us and the Administrator) We were also able to get "grassroots" feedback on Thandi's work in the area - all of which was enthusiastically positive, both about her and about the Black Sash.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the Karoo hospitality, and were inspired by the dedication of these two women. Les has initiated incredible improvements in the schooling opportunities for farm children, and Thandi's work has had a significant impact on for example, the delivery of state welfare grants.

Knysna:

Phumlani Bukashe visits Cape Town more frequently, but now also attends RAT and ACOM meetings only every two months. As we did last year, we had our August ACOM meeting in Knysna. One of our local members, Mairie Brimble kindly lent us her Kombi and Betty Davenport and Carol Lamb accompanied all the paid workers except David (who had a family commitment). We had a Sash meeting with the Knysna members on the Thursday evening and after the morning ACOM meeting, small interest group meetings in the afternoon.

It's a good opportunity to discuss advice office problems with each other, and iron out difficulties that arise because of us being "the same region" yet so distant. One doesn't get time for this quality of organisational interaction at annual conferences or workshops. It was agreed at this meeting that David Ngxale would accompany Phumlani on future trips to attend ACOM meetings in Cape Town, and would use the Thursday for training and support communication with Mowbray caseworkers.

Boland Rural:

There was a small but steady flow of queries from various areas where I had worked as a fieldworker. These were mainly related to state welfare grant problems, and in all cases we were able to link the community directly to the appropriate senior CPA official for future queries. In the case of the Worcester/Ashton payment problems (people were either paid double or made to sign for twice what they received, because the computer had not cleared the previous month's payments) we encouraged a senior delegation from the CPA to consult the various community pensioners' committees, visit the areas to explain and make acceptable arrangements for repayment of the double payments, instead of starting arbitrary deductions.

I was also able to help Miriam Moleleki in her efforts on behalf of retrenched or retired farmworkers and other homeless people in the De Doorns area. Following a march to present their demands to the local authority, they claimed a (prime development) site, erected some shelters for themselves, and refused to move - despite threats from the SAP and the

Municipality - saying they'd rather "sit and wait for the land in jail". After urgent high level discussions between their group, their lawyer (LRC) and the CPA, land was identified for development of a formal settlement, as well as for temporary informal "squatting".

We were asked by one of the young returned exiles to come and do some financial training in Zwelethemba (Worcester). A small group of young men wanted to start a brickmaking co-op, and hoped to secure foreign funds for this purpose. Thisbe Clegg and I went out to run a basic bookkeeping workshop for them but it seemed as if the young activist was more motivated than the rest of his comrades. He did rustle up a workshop group from amongst the youth, but it was a once-off event and couldn't be sustained because we spent as much time waiting for them as in the workshop.

The saga with the wife-battering ANC chairperson in Villiersdorp continued. After the third incident the Regional Council approved my request to write a letter to the ANC REC asking them to intervene with counselling and possible suspension, and advising that we would not be able to accept him as a spokesperson for the town until the matter was sorted out. There wasn't complete agreement about the issue and the woman who was doing the most support work in the area, although equally appalled by what was happening, decided that she would continue to have dealings with him - but visit in her capacity as an ANC member rather than on behalf of the Black Sash. There is no doubt that she has been of help both on local issues and to the battered wife because of this decision. At the time of writing he had just been suspended by the ANC, pending a hearing. However, his wife after the most recent assault (still carrying the scars of the wire used on her back) has - with encouragement from a church delegation - returned to him once again, and will probably again withdraw the charges and discontinue her divorce proceedings.

I have missed my rural work more than expected, and as the year turned out, it was a pity that we did not have more contact in this area. Fortunately there are several Cape Western members, notably Ros Bush, Anne Greenwell, Val Goldschmidt, Lu Harding, Sandra Haydon, and Val Rose Christie, who are willing to pick up on some of the requests for monitoring; through their interaction and the telephone we have managed to stay in touch.

Black Sash regions:

Early in the year, before I began my work as Advice Office Co-Ordinator, Natal Coastal had asked me to run a workshop with them to define a way forward in terms of prevailing constraints in their region. This was a great learning experience for me and provided insight - and in some cases foresight - which helped me avoid some pitfalls in my new job. Thanks Natal !

Marj Brown's National Advice Office Newsletter was a very positive addition to the year. I hope that it is the beginning of much more regular contact between the regional advice offices, and continues to keep us up to date about national activities and thinking. I have found each issue

interesting, and Marj can be enthusiastically congratulated and thanked for all her efforts in compiling it and getting it to us so promptly.

Other:

Also early in the year, I was asked to facilitate a clearing meeting for another local NGO, and this developed into a commitment which lasted until mid-June. With hindsight I think it was unwise to allow myself to give more time than that first meeting. It was an extremely complex conflict situation, and although I drew in other, more expert negotiators/mediators to work with me, it took a lot of time and creative energy. However, I do think that we managed to gain them the necessary time for the situation to change enough to alleviate most of their problems and again, I certainly learned a lot, so it was not without positive elements.

Radio

David organised an interview on Radio Xhosa in May, and managed to give a lot of information about our work in the approximately 3/4 hour air time he had. We all huddled around the radio - it was a lunch time programme - and even though I understood very little of the language, his tone was so warm and reassuring that it's no wonder our numbers increased (the increase had already started in March when we had 297 cases, but from May onwards numbers continued to rise steadily until they evened out at around 400 - 450 cases per month; other contributing factors were probably our outreach work into the townships on the pensions and maintenance issues, and our new waiting room in October)

We had been planning to follow up on this first radio slot, and David had tentative discussions about the possibility of a more regular programme, when we heard that the offices of Radio Xhosa were to move to Port Elizabeth. (We are most impressed with P E's new Eastern Province Herald column, and hope that they can perhaps carry through the regular radio programme as well?)

RAT

Sally and I from Mowbray, Phumlani from S. Cape and Thandi from Colesburg attended Rural Advice Training forum meetings in '92. Sally made useful contributions in relation to gender issues in rural training projects, and the fieldworkers were able to co-ordinate their work with that of other fieldworkers in their areas, at the same time effectively utilising the resources of service NGO's such as Development Action Group and Foundation for Contemporary Research - which are also participating organisations on the RAT forum.

My role in RAT was less useful (and with Sally as Training Co-ordinator, less clear) this year, but I was able to make a contribution to the update of the Para Legal Manual and facilitate one session at the annual T&G Workers Union Advice Office training course, which had some rural participants. It remains extremely useful generally to be part of this

forum which promotes quite an indepth understanding of the context in which we work, and remains an invaluable link with other organisations involved in training and human rights issues, as well as resources produced and other training and development projects in the Western Cape.

WORKERS

Volunteers

Working with so many regular volunteers was a new experience for me; I am deeply impressed by their commitment. This is probably also an appropriate place to thank Nora Henshilwood for her continuing, generous contribution which buys coffee and sandwiches for waiting advice seekers.

We were very sad to lose those few casework volunteers who left the office during the course of the year, and most particularly Mary Livingston who has done SO much work for so many, many years. Mary's experience and personality cannot possibly be replaced, but we have also been most fortunate in the new volunteer case workers.

We made the 2 hour training sessions more regular, on the third Friday of each month, and most of the volunteers attended these every month. The content of the training focussed mainly on our attitudes as advisors, learning to speak basic Xhosa and studying sections of the Para-Legal Manual. Speakers included Mr von Sittert of the CPA, volunteers who kept us up to date about their particular area of interest (for example, Betty on pensions, Noel on housing, Bastienne on Destitution, Sue Cooke on insurance.) The UIF questionnaire also stimulated a fascinating discussion about the dole, or other forms of social security. The workshops were also used to discuss problem cases, or particular successes, and were a wonderful opportunity for volunteers who worked separately from each other in their case-work, to come together, share skills and get to know one another.

Then there was the team of volunteers that helped us with the re-filing blitz. A boring, endless job - willingly and enthusiastically done.

And Penny Sachs and other volunteers who throughout the year have visited Ntando Mrubata, our young comrade from Worcester who became seriously ill from bed/wheelchair sores (he had one hole in his hip the size of a fist) and thank goodness was transferred to our local Conradie hospital before it was too late.

The two groups of volunteers that constitute our Advice Office and our Management Committees have been very effectively chaired by Betty and Thisbe respectively. Betty has also been very active as the pensions issue co-ordinator, with Noel Robb's help coping very well with an extremely demanding year; and Thisbe has been the Advice Office Treasurer and done most of my bookkeeping duties.

I cannot mention them all, but each one has her own very particular qualities that she brings to enrich our working environment, and we are deeply grateful for the time and skill that they bring to our work.

Paid staff

Except for Nikelwa Tengimfene, the World University Services Trainee placement, the number of paid staff members only increased by one half day post. Somehow the "creative redeployment" made it feel as though there were many more of us. Perhaps this was because there were four people in new jobs in the office, not really knowing what to do for quite a few months.

It was a good year in terms of staff development. Self esteem was improved by the salary increases, medical aid and now finally signed Conditions of Employment, with detailed job descriptions for which we must thank yet another volunteer, Anne Schuster. Sally worked with the staff to identify our individual training needs and set objectives for ourselves; she then set up a process of regular progress checks and opportunities for practice - for example, chairing and minute taking skills were practiced at the various meetings/workshops, each of which has a different "level" of difficulty.

We have continued the weekly staff meetings (except on the Fridays of the AOCOM meeting and the volunteers training workshop) every Friday for 2 to 3 hours. These have been very important team building times, and also give us an opportunity to discuss caseworkers' "hits of the week" and maybe reflect collectively on how the case work could be improved.

I attended the Alan Brews Participative Management by Objectives workshop in Johannesburg and after this we used the objective setting principles on an almost weekly basis in terms of outstanding work. Noma, Nikelwa and Thandi then attended the same workshop when Alan facilitated it in Cape Town. (David unfortunately couldn't come because the chosen venue was not accessible to the physically disabled - reminding us how important it is to ensure that people CAN claim their rights) These workshops have been invaluable, and our evaluation and forward planning was both more comprehensive and more specified than last year.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

The biggest office administration step we took was to completely change our filing system. This involved refiling thousands of case sheets into individual buff folders, filing these alphabetically - with a category card system for crossreferencing and analysis. It was terrifying, expensive and time consuming. But now that it's done, we don't know how we ever managed any other way.

Another move that has had a big impact on our work is our extended office space into the house next door. This has opened an office for a waiting room for advice seekers and they no longer have to sit on a long bench in a dark, narrow passage staring at a wall less than 2 meters in front of them, and with everyone who enters the building walking past them. It has also meant that we can have a separate resource room, a meeting room and two separate offices. It too, is expensive and terrifying - we must find ways to use this wonderful space to its best advantage.

We've got a long way to go before our office systems will be totally effective, but we certainly gained lots of ground (literally and figuratively) this year.

Both the AO and Management committees have taken an active interest in our ideas and our work, and this has been an inspiration.

Formally, the AOcom has a chairperson and treasurer who volunteer or are solicited, a representative elected by Regional Council, and if possible a volunteer representative from the monitoring group. Other members of the committee are usually invited to join because of the particular contribution they make to the advice office, and all volunteer caseworkers are automatically part of the committee if they want to and have the time. Paid staff are part of the committee and must report to it, verbally and in writing, at its monthly meetings which are on a set day.

The Management Committee is new to our region this year. In Cape Western we have three "sections" of Sash employing workers, viz. the region, the advice office and the national office. Each has a representative on the Mcom, as does the AOTrust, through its local trustee. All three the Treasurers are also on the committee, but do not all have to attend all meetings as they also have a separate forum for communication. However, no financial decisions may be taken by the MCom unless at least the one relevant treasurer is present. Three staff reps are allowed, one from each "section", but in practice there has only been one rep up to now. The chairperson is elected by the group; there is no quorum unless everyone is represented; minutes are kept; except for "emergencies" the MCom meets monthly on the same day as the AOcom, about 15 minutes after the AOcom meeting is over, and for about one hour. This is heavy going for the volunteers who serve on both committees (most of them) because it means back to back meetings from 9 am to about 2 pm, but at least everything is current, and they don't have to travel to the office for two separate meetings.

The MCom facilitated an evaluation/forward planning process in the last two months of the year, and this was both sobering and motivating. The Alan Brews Management workshops have been exceptionally useful in terms of this work, and it is a great credit to the Black Sash that it responds to these organisational needs with such appropriate timing, and so inclusively.

OBJECTIVES FOR '93

From our assessment and forward planning in the volunteers' workshops, we identified certain training needs, as well as some gaps we would like to fill. These have not yet been tightened into objectives, except that at least one training need will be addressed each month. They are as follows:

- * Staying up to date and clear on all relevant Legislation
- * Xhosa greetings and basic case history questions
- * More thorough case sheet information recording
- * Coping with our emotional involvement
- * Making decisions confidently
- * Speaking confidently
- * Neater more legible handwriting
- * Letter writing
- * Learning to use our PC confidently
- * Organising our resources.

We are also committed to:

- * more detailed research - at least a full project on Maintenance (State and Paternal) including court records, visits, case sheet analysis, interviews, legislation - leading to a reasoned recommendation to organisation and state.
- * regular (monthly) case analysis for follow-up, and further research as identified
- * preparation of resource/contact/procedure posters for advice workers' easy reference
- * planning waiting room activities

These were included in the formal forward planning session we held, and in most cases have time deadlines and responsible individuals.

What has most clearly emerged is a need for Analysis and Research in our office. Our first priorities are maintenance, provision for the destitute, and lawyers' ethics in MVA matters, but this needs to be an ongoing and carefully planned part of our work.

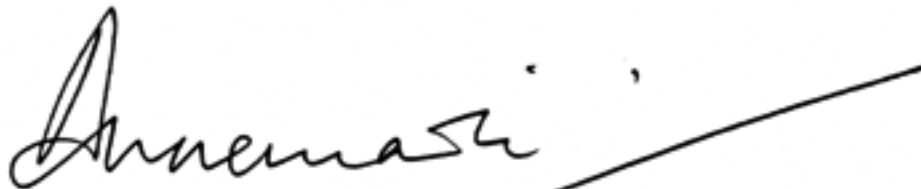
We recognised the importance of continued support to our Karoo and South Cape workers, as well as better consultation and earlier planning of our annual budget.

If possible we will also tackle voter education programmes, and media education. I think that in consultation with the Education for Democracy forum, and using our existing network of contacts, there might be a small but useful role for us in the second half of the year preparing groups of rural women to become voter rights educators, and I'm looking forward to getting to work on this in March.

Obviously our ongoing work will be informed by our National Conference in April, and some of our goals may be modified, but we feel more focussed now that we have a plan of action against which we can check progress every few months. We think that '93 may be very productive.

CONCLUSION

I write these last lines the day before going on long leave for two months. It has been a difficult and exhausting year, but it is a measure of its success that I leave everyone with a general feeling of confidence that they can cope with complete competence in the absence of a co-ordinator. We have built on solid foundations laid under Sue van der Merwe's talented guidance, and have a good team of workers and management, and a fairly well organised office. Thank you all.



Annemarie Hendrikz
22 January '93