



Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers
Te Rōpū Tauwhiro i Aotearoa

www.anzasw.nz

CE Address - ANZASW 60th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

Tēnā koutou katoa, and as I have just returned from Samoa, Malo le soifua. Warm Pacific greetings to you all. Members, friends, educators, peers, mentors, leaders, new graduates, students, social workers! It's wonderful to have you all here with us this evening!

What a joy it is to stand here with you tonight as we celebrate 60 years of our Association, Te Rōpū Tauwhiro i Aotearoa, ANZASW. This evening is about more than marking time—it is about honouring the incredible journey we have been on, the whakapapa and stories that bind us, and the shared vision, that we continue to build, and that keeps pulling us forward. I hope that this rare moment of celebration this evening reminds us of everything we are and everything we aspire to be as an association, with our roots being in Rangatiratanga, Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Aroha, Kotahitanga, Mātātoa and Wairuatanga.

I have to tell you, I am still buzzing after flying in from Samoa just this afternoon, despite waking up at 2am to get my flight back via Fiji. It was truly such an honour to represent ANZASW at the Commonwealth People's Forum and attend the Youth Forum. I love Samoa, I love being Samoan and I love being of the Pacific. Standing alongside our Pacific whānau—Associate Professor Yvonne Crichton-Hill (of the University of Canterbury and an ANZASW Member, also our Head of Delegation) and Malakai Waqa Kaitani (our brother who is the Interim President of the Association of Fiji Social Workers and Social Work Educator at the University of the South Pacific in Suva) —we brought our voices to spaces that aren't always easy to enter, and even harder to navigate. To be real - the lingering colonial elitism and bias were evident, both during and in the lead up to this hui, but we were there to reclaim space and say what needed to be said. And we certainly did that! Countering narratives that talked about the importance of listening to young people, yet very visibly, without young people being at the table or on the panels that these words were being spoken from.

Countering the idea that the concept of commonwealth is solely a hopeful, unified space; it is those things, but it is not detached from the hurtful legacy that brought many of us together.

One thing that stood out for me is the growing recognition that the issues we care deeply about—like child protection reform, equity, reconciliation, restoration, and climate justice—these are Pacific issues and global issues. In many ways, I saw deep parallels with our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean, who are also seeking redress, are speaking loudly about the impact of climate inaction. The work we are doing here, within ANZASW, and that we aspire to do, aligns with the work being done across the region, and that is where our strength lies. These connections, these shared efforts, are essential as we move forward – and coming back from Samoa, I value this more than ever. Amongst the challenge, I saw incredible hope and resilience, stories of overcoming and resisting the status quo. It was powerful! Tonight, let's acknowledge the importance of growing solidarity—within Aotearoa, across the Pacific, and beyond.

Tonight is a time to reflect on who we are—our whakapapa as an association, the work we've done, and the relationships we've built. For 60 years, this association has been a place of belonging for social workers—whether just starting out or having been in the field for decades. Over that time, we have faced the biggest of challenges, alongside many successes, driven by a shared belief that we must make a greater difference.

But we can't kid ourselves: the road hasn't always been smooth for us, and it certainly isn't a smooth one in the present. Right now, we are navigating immense challenges across the spaces that we represent—funding constraints, workforce shortages, sustainability pressures, and the relentless undermining of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Yet, what has kept us afloat for 60 years will keep us moving forward—the knowledge that we are not alone in this journey. We are a community, and we must stand and face these rough seas together.

Speaking of community, I want to take a moment to acknowledge a truly special contribution to tonight's celebration. Just last week, as we pulled together the last threads of our planning for this celebration, someone said, "Wait—we need a cake!" (that someone being Madam President). And in true ANZASW fashion, one of our own stepped up.

Our kaumātua, Matua Te Naihi Wilson, did not just offer to help—he got into the kitchen and created a beautiful cake to mark our 60th anniversary. And he did not stop there. He personally delivered it, bringing it all the way from Whakatū Nelson to make sure it was here for tonight. It is a reminder that ANZASW is about more than just professional connections—it's about community,

generosity, getting stuff done, and the relationships that sustain us. Please join me in thanking Matua Te Naihi for his support with his time, and across many other spaces.

As we reflect on the past 60 years, let us also take this moment to think about where we're headed next. No doubt, the world around us is rapidly changing, and so are the demands on social work when it comes to the speed of technological advancements, the pressure to do more with less, with greater productivity and pressured measurement of impacts, to speak up, or sometimes wanting to, but having to reconcile the discomfort of needing to tow the line.

Over the coming months, it is an imperative that we strengthen our connections within our Association. WE must extend these to Pacific whānau, offering mentorship and to be mentored, to commit to amplifying our collective voice. Climate action, human rights, and equity are not optional for us. Our government is persistent in their undermining of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We must mobilise and stand for what is at the foundation of our association, and our profession. We must firstly do this for ourselves, but also knowing that our people from across the commonwealth are looking to us for inspiration in terms of what it looks like to harness our freedom of expression, to voice our dissent and peacefully resist antidemocratic process, cultural imperialism and insist what will not tolerate. Next month, a hikoī will start from Te Tai Tokerau and will arrive in Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, at the steps of Parliament. ANZASW will be there, and I encourage you to activate, however you feel is best, as an ally or on the front line.

I have the privilege of knowing Suluaifi Brianna Fruean, more so through friends, but I remember first meeting her when I was living in Samoa and she was only just out of high school. She is a strong, fearless, young, global Pacific voice for climate activism, speaking powerfully to leaders across the globe. During the opening plenary of the people's forum, she spoke about the vision of knowing where you are going, something I often like to talk about, but her emphasis was on the memory of her grandmother. That we, or our parents, or our tipuna have memory of that time where we were the custodians of all our lands, where we only knew our languages, when our lands and seas were plentiful. The idea of memory, or generational memory, will speak to us all in different ways. But in the form of whoever we are, it is important to reflect that often what we are aspiring for, there was a time where we often, and in context, already had it! It is in our living or generational memory, which often is not too much of a distant past.

I'm on a roll, and most of this was written from the plane or at the airport in Nadi, but tonight is a reminder of the importance of celebrating who we are—the work we do, the privilege we have to walk alongside others, and the legacy we carry. But it is also a call to action. My hope is that this celebration marks the forward chapter that we step into from here.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this incredible journey—from our founding members to those stepping into leadership, those that have just joined us or those that are new to our profession. You are the heart of this association, and it is through your passion, commitment, and aroha that ANZASW continues to thrive.

Let us take hold of this evening of celebration—this feeling of connection, pride, and reflection. And tomorrow, when the mahi continues in the morning, let us carry this energy with us.

Enjoy the rest of the evening, whānau.

Kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui—be strong, be bold, and keep moving forward with courage and heart.

Ngā mihi nui, and here is to the next 60 years!



Nathan Chong-Nee

Chief Executive

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW)