



**The Supply-Demand Crisis in Social Work: A Higher Education and NGO Perspective**

**Plenary speaker: Dr RP Reyneke**

**ASASWEI & NASW (SA) 1<sup>st</sup> Joint National Social work Conference**

**14 – 16 October 2009**

**Champagne Sports Resort, Drakensberg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

Social workers are increasingly viewed as key strategic resources in addressing the needs and challenges of society. Their training and skills render them valuable in not only the social development sector but due to their diverse knowledge and skills they are also seen as a resource in other sectors. The government recognises social work as a scarce skill and proposes that, as with all scarce skills, strategies must be developed to facilitate the recruitment and retention of such skills.

There seems to be a critical problem with the recruitment of social workers to the profession and once recruited, with their poor retention in the profession. A problem that further exacerbates the inability of the sector to retain social workers is the lack of support for these men and women, and the poor working conditions to which they are subjected. This often leads to social worker burnout and an inability on their part to render an effective service (Department of Social Development, 2003).

In an endeavour to recruit and retain social workers in South Africa, the Department of Social Development embarked on a national recruitment and retention strategy. This strategy includes a number of objectives, one of them focusing specifically on the recruitment of students to study social work (Department of Social Development, 2003). Currently there are 3 529 students enrolled on the departmental scholarship programme, which is well worth celebrating (Skweyiya, 2009). However, certain aspects of the programme are creating problems for the higher education sector and NGOs alike.

The needs of South Africa and its employers demand that social workers are well-grounded in general practice with knowledge, understanding and skills in a variety of settings. In this paper attention will be paid to the problems experienced by the higher education sector in its quest to train students suitably for the profession. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the impact of the recruitment and retention strategy on the NGO sector, as it not only plays an important part in the training of social workers, but is also a very important role-player in social development at large.

**Short biography: Dr RP Reyneke**

Dr Reyneke has been lecturing in Social Work since 1993 when he started working as a professional assistant in the Department of Social Work at the University of the Free State. He obtained his PhD in 2001, with the title *A narrative approach to community empowerment*.



In 2005 he was elected to the position of Departmental Chairperson and as the Programme Manager of the Programme for Social Service Professions.

He currently serves on several committees in the field of social work, such as the Executive Management of Child Welfare Bloemfontein and Childline Free State, Chairperson of the Regional Board of Child Welfare South Africa, member of the National Board of Child Welfare South Africa, Chairperson of the Free State branch of the National Association of Social Workers (SA), and is a member of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions. He has presented papers and workshops nationally and internationally on topics such as community work, life skills, teambuilding, adventure-based counselling and, lately, restorative practices.

