

Presenter: Linda Briskman

Conference theme 5: Social work and social policy

Social work advocacy in Australia: Challenging immigration detention

The paper explores the conflicting roles of social workers and other human services professionals within organisational environments that are increasingly focused on concepts of risk management, conformity and limitations on public engagement. It examines questions of dual loyalty and discusses the way social workers can traverse the question of loyalty to the organisation or priority to the vulnerable groups which social workers encounter. Using the example of asylum seekers, the paper presents a case study from Australia – The People’s Inquiry into Detention – which social work academics initiated to expose the malevolence of the mandatory immigration detention regime and to influence policy change. The paper draws on ethical responsibilities enshrined in social work codes of ethics as well as examining the work of Levinas and the obligation to reach out to and welcome the stranger.

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