



**SPA WA**  
School Psychologists Association of Western Australia Inc.

# THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The first 35 years

In the context of the school psychology profession in WA





Foreword	1
Introduction	2
Acknowledgements	3
SPA WA Timeline	4
School psychology history before SPAWA	5
The Foundation Years (1989-1993)	8
The Formative and Protective Years (1993-2002)	10
The Steadying and Stabilising Years (2002-2006)	13
The Calm and the Turbulent Years (2006-2013)	15
The Consolidating Years (2014-2016)	19
The Connecting Years (2016-2019)	21
The Disrupted Years (2019-2021)	23
The Regenerative and Renewal Years (2021-2023)	26
The Present Years (2023- )	28
The Future Years	29
References	30
Appendices	31



# Foreword

Welcome to the History of the School Psychologists' Association of Western Australia (SPAWA).

In its 35th anniversary year, the 2024 Committee commissioned this work to document and celebrate the dedication, passion, and extensive contributions to the school psychology profession made by current and past members, Committee Members, Life Members, Friends of SPAWA, award finalists and winners, and our Patron over the past 35 years. It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce this work to commemorate the Association's continuous mission to connect, inform and inspire school psychologists across all sectors in Western Australia.

SPAWA was established in 1989 by a small group of School Psychologists who were keen to provide professional support to, and advocacy for, School Psychologists in WA. SPAWA is affiliated with the Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools (APACS) professional Association, previously known as the Australian Guidance and Counsellors Association (AGCA) and is an active Association that is comprised of School Psychologists working in public, Catholic and Independent schools. Our Association provides opportunities for resource sharing, professional development and regular events addressing the complex aspects of working as a school psychologist.

Chris Gostelow and Herman Bootsma were approached to write this History as both have long and differing connections to SPAWA. Chris as the Department of Education's inaugural Chief Psychologist, a school psychologist and SPAWA member. Herman as a long-standing SPAWA Committee member, including as Membership Secretary for many years. Both bring unique and complementary perspectives on the past 35 years, and we are deeply grateful for their willingness to take on this work. Their collaborative, respectful approach and dedication to creating a thoughtful record are truly appreciated. Thank you, Chris and Herman.

Our Association stands to support school psychology professionals dedicated to excellence, collaboration, and the continuous improvement of student educational outcomes in WA. Every Committee member brings a unique perspective, skills and knowledge that collectively drives our mission forward. This year, we are excited to present this record of all the work that has gone before us. The pages that follow outline the years of each Presidency as they and the Committee responded to the ever-changing landscape of education and psychology. Our agenda is designed to foster both individual and collective success.

In reflecting on our past achievements and looking ahead, I am reminded that our progress is driven by the dedication and passion of our members. Your engagement and feedback are essential as we strive to make meaningful impacts within our profession. Together, we can continue to create a vibrant and dynamic environment where knowledge flourishes and professionals' effect positive change.

Thank you for your continued commitment and contributions. We are excited about the future and look forward to what we will accomplish together.

Sincerely,

*Sharon Declerck*  
**President**  
SPAWA





# Introduction

The School Psychologists' Association of Western Australian (Inc.), initially referred to as SPA then more commonly by its acronym SPAWA, is a professional guild, a group of professionals who share a common interest, passion or area of work. SPAWA occupies a professional place that fosters collaboration among school psychologists regardless of their employer.

It is not possible to bring together a history of SPAWA without reflecting on the context in which this occurred. There is no other single document that captures the full history of the school psychology profession in WA. This document deliberately refers to relevant aspects, particularly points of significant reform, of the school psychology services in WA, especially when they relate to SPAWA. It is hoped that this document will be of historical value for SPAWA and future generations of school psychologists. Similarly, it is hoped that this document will be a tool for SPAWA leadership to use to influence school psychology in WA and nationally.

The status of the profession has grown immensely, and the influence of the Association has expanded over time, from a relatively minor player to a position of professional authority.

The book has been organised into chapters based on the presidential terms. We want to emphasise that the chapter titles reflect the events of the time, and not the leadership styles of the presidents.

The 35 years of SPAWA history covers the significant changes that occurred in school psychology more broadly. Concepts, theories, practice, language and technology altered dramatically during the period. Practices of school psychologists at any point in time were contemporary for that time and based on the best interests of students. This document captures some of these practices but the authors caution readers to avoid judging people's professional behaviour against today's standards.

In WA there has been a longstanding mutual respect, harmony and a desire to collaborate between the leaders of school psychology services in the public and private sectors. Ongoing partnerships, particularly in suicide prevention, have been a testimony to this. School psychologists have sometimes moved and even been seconded between the services. This goodwill has extended to their relationship with SPAWA and support for the Association as a professional organisation for all school psychologists in the state, regardless of employment arrangements. In times of major reform and change for any or all of the services, SPAWA has been a constant and stabilising presence.

The material for this document is derived from a variety of sources. The first was the authors' recollections and experience. This was supplemented by a variety of publicly available documents. The SPAWA archives, including newsletters, meeting minutes, AGM records, and various correspondence, proved to be invaluable resources. Each president was interviewed using a consistent set of questions, which added tremendous value to the project. Leaders of the three school psychology services were interviewed; they offered great insight and information. Every effort was made to gather accurate information and condense it into a clear, concise document, though it was not possible to include everything.





# Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank those contributors who gave so generously of their time and were able to open the (sometimes rusty) filing cabinets of their memories of the Association and events.

These individuals met with the authors either in person or by phone, and their willingness to share their recollections, insights, and anecdotes was invaluable. We made it a priority to keep Sharon Declerck, in her role as president, updated on our progress and any challenges we encountered. Her readiness to meet with us by phone every couple of weeks, offering valuable feedback and advocacy, was greatly appreciated.

Finally, to our supportive wives, Louise and Jane, thank you for your patience, tolerance and encouragement. To all of those who provided assistance either directly or indirectly, we express our gratitude to you.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures, and to the elders, both past and present.

Published September 2024.



# The History of SPAWA Timeline

## The Foundation Years

1989 - 1993

The beginning

## The Formative & Protective Years

1993 - 2003

Strengthening of governance

## The Steady & Stabilising Years

2003 - 2006

Solidifying the foundations

## The Calm & The Turbulent Years

2006 - 2013

A stable anchor

## The Consolidating Years

2013 - 2016

Positive culture and growth

## The Connecting Years

2016 - 2019

A new generation

## The Disrupted Years

2019 - 2021

A changing world

## The Regenerative & Renewal Years

2021 - 2023

Rejuvenation and reinvigoration

## The Present Years

2023 -

## The Future Years



# School Psychology History Before SPAWA

The purpose for having school psychologists, the nature of their work, the training requirements for entry to the profession, accountability, standards, professionalism and the title they have worked under have all changed significantly since 1941.

The Department of Education in Western Australia (the Department) appointed the first Careers Officer in 1941. In 1944 there were more than a dozen Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff and the role expanded to include interviewing school leavers. By 1945 the service had shifted to include referrals for a psychological service and visits to schools. The role then became known as Guidance Officer (GO), with teacher and psychology training required.

Over time the focus was further expanded to include individual and group intelligence testing and counselling. By 1950, using terminology of that period, students were being “referred” to GOs by schools due to “physical handicap,” social maladjustment”, “educational retardation” or “mental handicap”.

There was professional debate and tension within the service at the leadership and practitioner levels as behavioural approaches were considered alongside more humanistic approaches. However, by the 1960s GOs became driven by behaviourist approaches, and preventative work was also perceived to be valuable.

The GO workforce continued to grow such that by 1970 there were over 70 GO FTE and the number was rising significantly. Curiously though, in 1972 the one GO based in Geraldton also serviced all schools north of there, including the Kimberley! Further, to supplement this, there was a GO who spent part of the year towing a caravan to some country towns in order to undertake student testing.

At the start of the 1970s GOs were considered more like teachers with a specialty in psychology. Some GOs undertook further psychology study to grow their qualifications. Eligibility for the British Psychological Society (BPS) at that point was a 3-year qualification whereas the Australian Psychological Society (APS) had a 4-year requirement for membership. Ironically, more GOs had membership with the BPS than the APS in an effort to enhance their professional connection.

In 1973 the separation of teaching and psychology became pronounced when the first ever group of psychology graduates with no teaching qualification were employed on an understanding that they would complete a Diploma in Education while on the job. The discussions about psychology meant that by the mid-1970s, Department leadership was looking into role ambiguities, professional ethics, professional supervision and the notion of “direct” vs, “indirect” service provision. It is interesting that these are issues still being considered today.

Questions were being raised that if the work was becoming more psychological in nature, then should the job title reflect that. The title “school psychologist” was toyed with.



In the 1970s GOs were based in secondary schools but afforded some service to adjacent primary schools, on request. One key function was group intelligence testing. In rooms set up as formal examination rooms they exclusively administered tests to all students in years 7, 9 and 11 in the state. This was a major time commitment for GOs – setting up, overseeing, marking and then entering all data onto student record cards kept in the school administration office and accessible to all staff. The practice was professionally and ethically challenged by some GOs and ultimately by 1980 the role was abolished.

By the beginning of the 1980s the workforce had risen to about 170 FTE and the focus for GOs had changed. The GO role was to provide counselling, assessment, liaison, training and curriculum program development. There was an Operating Handbook for Guidance Officers. Secondary school work widened to include student subject selection, social-emotional and behavioural counselling and more comprehensive individual assessment. Some GOs worked exclusively in primary schools and the scope included, “testing”, “attainment”, school readiness and placement, intellectual assessment, some projective tests, “student behaviour problems” and some group psychosocial work, including the story of the “Warm Fuzzies.” District Guidance Officers (DGOs) were responsible for their respective teams of GOs and carried significant influence in the Department.

By the 1980s the Department had a common induction program for new GOs. In the early 1980s a dedicated Training Officer coordinated induction for new staff, who had two days per week of induction training for the entire first year (60 days in total), and in-service training for all other GOs. To supplement the induction program and other “in-service” training programs, external programs were made available to some GOs in psychological counselling approaches, such as Rational Emotional Therapy and Solutions Focused Brief Therapy. However, individual GOs had great flexibility and control over their mode of operating in schools.

The Non-Government Guidance Service had emerged in the 1970s with a leader whose task was to run a centralised system for contracting psychologists from a pool for sessional work in schools. By the 1980’s the Non-Government Guidance Service had evolved and grown significantly to comprise a team of Guidance Officers who serviced metropolitan Perth, Bunbury and Geraldton. The Department supplemented this and provided limited guidance services to rural Catholic and Independent schools.

By 1980, GOs starting with the Department were issued with a standard set of psychological and academic attainment tests. These were issued on permanent loan but remained the property of the Department, and contained the following:

- Binet form LM (with 1972 norms tables)
- Wechsler Intelligence Test for Children (Revised)
- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test
- Slosson Intelligence Test
- Visual Motor Integration (Beery) Manual
- Stop watch or stop watch calculator.



GOs received “referrals” (often for “testing”) in paper format. Informed consent for primary services was often indirectly provided, but without any explanation to parents about the service, risks or interventions. Secondary school work didn’t always consider informed consent either. Record keeping was paper and pen, and manilla “files” were used for Primary student records. Reporting involved pressing hard with a pen on standard issue Guidance Branch triplicate pads with carbon paper; one copy was retained on file; one went to the school and the other to the District Office.

Registration was with the Psychologists Board of WA. The two-year provisional period was comparatively unstructured, largely unsupervised and documentation was loose. If the Superintendent and a couple of school principals were satisfied, then approval for registration with the Board was granted. It was in the late 1980s that supervision guidelines were introduced.

In the mid-1980s corporal punishment was abolished and a Ministerial Working Party was set up to look at school discipline. The result was that whole school behavioural approaches were promoted and supported for public schools, this fostered both school level systems thinking and heralded a legitimate and visible whole school role for GOs. Schools that adopted the Managing Student Behaviour whole school approach were required to include their GO in the development team. This resulted in GOs being incorporated into the leadership teams of secondary schools.

The concept of self-esteem became prominent in the 1980s. Even though much of the work undertaken was, by today’s standards, not evidence-based, GOs promoted this focus. It was effectively a first move by GOs into what we now regard as promoting social-emotional learning and student wellbeing.

At the end of 1987 the Department had made the decision to close the Guidance Branch. Through 1988 and 1989 the Department engaged in internal consultations and the concept of Student Services teams was created. The idea extended to a School Psychology Service with school psychologists who could act as change agents. This strengthening of the psychology focus would have been of great interest to and valued by the then Minister for Education, Carmen Lawrence, who was herself a qualified psychologist. This period of intense change produced significant anxiety and tension in the Department’s workforce. Changes to working conditions and industrial implications also contributed to the unease. However, people recognised that there was an opportunity for improved professionalism, creation of new district teams and associated changes to leadership arrangements.

It was in 1988, during this period of impending change, that the Guidance Officers Association, established circa 1985, convened a conference which was held at Murdoch University with 21 delegates in attendance. One outcome from this conference was a decision to form an independent professional organisation or guild to offer professional support for all school psychologists in WA. It was under these circumstances that the idea of a School Psychologists’ Association emerged.



# The Foundation Years 1989 - 1993

**President:** Isobel Boylan

**Vice Presidents:** Ruth Eszes

Alan Plumb

Peter Simpson

It was at the Guidance Officers Association conference that a decision was made to rename and reform the association as the School Psychologists' Association (SPA). Isobel Boylan was elected to the position of inaugural President with two Vice Presidents, Ruth Eszes and Alan Plumb. A further eight members took various positions in the Executive Committee.

An unconfirmed story has it that two GOs and founding members tossed a coin to decide who would hold membership number one of the fledgling Association. Grant Walsh, the Membership Secretary became member 89/02, and Nigel Boundy, the Treasurer, took the premier membership.

On 12 September 1989, after an application by Grant Walsh, SPA was incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1987, officially establishing the association. The cost of incorporation was met by the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association (AGCA), later Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools (APACS). The rather generic constitution, required to establish SPAWA, was adapted from that of the Western Australian District High School Principals Association. Subsequent changes would be required throughout the years.

The first newsletter of the Association in December 1989 highlighted the initial focus of the Executive Committee's deliberations. Included in the newsletter was also a letter from AGCA, setting out the benefits and urging affiliation with this national network of associated bodies. The newsletter also hinted at the possibility of the first annual SPAWA conference. New members were encouraged with membership fees set at \$20.00. A more formal approach was later taken to applications for membership, with new members now requiring a proposer and seconder to join the Association. An inaugural two-day conference was held on 29-30 September 1990 at Murdoch University, the first of what has become an anticipated event on the calendar of many school psychologists. There were 21 delegates who attended and catering consisted of sandwiches from the cafeteria.

The 1990 Memorandum of Agreement between the then Ministry of Education and the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia enabled the establishment of a School Psychology Service (SPS).

In 1991 leadership arrangements for the SPS saw the end of the DGO role and the new Senior School Psychologist role take over the district leadership. Principal School Psychologists positions were created with system-wide responsibilities. Over a transition period in the early 1990s, individual school psychologists had the option to remain on GO industrial conditions of employment or to go over to school psychologist conditions of employment. There was ongoing tension in the workforce as people operated within districts but under two different sets of conditions.



The second SPAWA conference was held in 1991. The theme, “A Service in Transition” provided the opportunity to reflect on the progress made by the School Psychology Service. John Hattie and Peter Simpson presented some succinct arguments and challenged the thinking. The Annual General Meeting was held in conjunction with the conference at the end of Term 3, which has become the established practice. The AGM set the objectives for the Association for the following year, focussing on increased membership and professional activities, and coordinating activities for the inaugural Psychology Week. Several members participated enthusiastically, including television appearances by Wendy Doyle, Barry Dowsett and Eileen Kuruckchi.

Newsletters at this time facilitated professional discussion and provided an opportunity for responses to the School Psychology Service developed policies and procedures for school psychologists. Articles were also contributed by members. The Association, with a focus on professional development, organised a workshop on the Myers-Briggs Type indicator. The Association also held a competition for an official logo. However, it wasn’t until some years later that the logo was developed by Grania McCudden.

Professionally this was also a period of immense change. While secondary GOs/school psychologists were regularly dealing with students with self-harm and suicidal behaviour there was no common understanding or approach to suicide risk assessment. Further, postvention wasn’t a term known or used. That all changed for all three education sectors in 1990 with the development and roll-out by the Department of the first version to what is today known as Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training Program. It wasn’t long before schools then recognised and highly valued school psychologists as holding expertise and consultancy skills in this important area.

In 1991 a student was murdered in a Perth secondary school by a peer. Confronting to the school and community more generally, this event saw school psychologists coordinate a whole of school critical incident approach. This event established a legitimate and valued professional connection for education leaders and the wider community between school psychologists and school critical incident support that has continued to the present day.

In 1992 Service Agreements were routinely introduced for individual public schools across the State. This process offered schools the ability for schools to negotiate with their school psychologist for their services and outcomes based on identified school needs and a district service menu. This process allowed school psychologists to be perceived, not just for individual student assessment and intervention, but also as “consultants” and providers of professional learning.

The third annual SPAWA conference titled New Challenges for School Psychologists, held in September 1992 at the Lillee-Marsh Stand at the WACA, was deemed to be highly successful. At the AGM, members voted to maintain affiliation with the AGCA. The Conference was followed up by workshops with prominent behavioural specialist, Bill Rogers.

Isobel finished her term as President in Term 3 1993. In her time as president, the membership had grown to over 100. She urged the Association to continue providing professional development opportunities, with a preference for using skills from within, rather than relying solely on national and international expertise. At this time too, a number of people associated with the Executive opted not to stand for re-election. Of interest is Isobel’s observation that more school psychologists from the private sector were becoming members of the Association.





# The Formative and Protective Years 1993 - 2003

**President:** Ken Glasgow

**Vice Presidents:** Shelley Hatton (1993-1995)

Terry Moore (1995 - 96)

Coosje Griffiths (1996 - 2000)

Maura O'Connell (2000 - 2001)

Grania McCudden (2001 - 2003)

There was no succession planning in place when Isobel announced that she would be vacating the seat of President in Term 3 1993. Ken Glasgow's elevation to the position of President came with little warning and as a surprise – to Ken. He was approached by Isobel an hour before the closure of the conference and asked, "Have you got your speech ready?" Ken had "wanted a quiet life," but Isobel was persuasive, and told him she was confident in his ability to look after the organisation and the profession. Jim Phillips took on the role of Treasurer, a position he was to hold until he relinquished the role many years later.

Ken's intention as President was to protect and grow the Association, as well as raise the profile of School Psychology as a profession. This required refining the Association's constitution, building the membership and providing "in-servicing" and professional learning for school psychologists. The centrepiece of this focus was the annual SPAWA conference.

As the result of a request by members at the 1993 AGM, a review of the constitution was conducted by Ken Glasgow, Grant Walsh and Tim Thornton. This resulted in recommendations for amendments which were lodged with the Ministry for Fair Trading in 1995.

SPAWA presented professional learning in the form of Friday Forums for members on a variety of topics. Although there was little contact with the WA Registration Board, there was an interface to make sure the professional learning aligned with their requirements. Under Ken's leadership the annual conference became a feature on the professional learning calendar for school psychologists and the one thing SPA became renowned for, sometimes to the exclusion of other areas where SPAWA was seeking influence.

A number of different venues were used for the conference, including the Lillee-Marsh Stand at the WACA, and various hotels before settling at the Parmelia Hilton from 2000 until 2005.

For school psychology in WA this was a period of settling after a period of significant change. Districts operated with high levels of autonomy but the commitment to all education sector school psychologists negotiating a Service Agreement with each of their schools was common across the State. The title "school psychologist" was becoming more widely accepted by all parties although there were still occasions when school psychologists had to defend the title with school administrators who preferred the title Guidance Officer or counsellor as being less 'intimidating.'





By the mid-1990s there was a strong sense of threat and change. The TAFE Counselling Service, the closest equivalent to the School Psychology Service, was disbanded and there was talk of disbandment the School Psychology Service and some other services. This caused widespread unease. SPAWA's response included meetings with representatives from the Primary Principals Association, the Education Support Principals Association, and the Secondary Principals Association to discuss an approach or stance regard possible privatisation or restructure. In 1994, SPAWA entered discussions about placing school psychologists directly under school principals, driven by pressure from Senior High Schools and a desire to reduce regional office costs. After weeks of negotiations, it was agreed that school psychologists would remain based in regional offices, preserving their flexibility to serve multiple schools rather than being tied to individual ones.

Deloitte's Touche Tohmatsu was contracted by the Department to undertake an external review of the quality and effectiveness of a range of Services - School Psychology, School Welfare Officers, School Social Workers and English as a Second Language Visiting Teacher Service. The SPAWA executive held multiple meetings with Deloitte, the Director and Executive Director of Student Services, and key politicians to emphasize the critical role of school psychologists and advocate against privatising the service. These discussions aimed to ensure that decision-makers understood the value of the School Psychology Service and the potential loss of flexibility if privatised. They finalised their report in 1996. The recommendations of this report included enabling more local level and school decision making and flexibility in service mix and access and a focus on central support for professional issues and policy.

It is important to view the pressures on the School Psychology Service during Deloitte's review within a broader national context. At the time, governments across Australia were cutting spending, leading to the outsourcing or closure of non-essential services, including the elimination of School Psychology Services in NSW and Victoria. The redundancy of hundreds of educational psychologists in these states coincided with increased behavioural problems in NSW schools and a rise in youth suicides in Victoria. Discussions with NSW and Victorian Student Services Directors provided valuable insight into the impact of such cuts and informed negotiations with Western Australia's Education Department.

The Non-Government Guidance Service became the Non-Government School Psychology Service in the mid-1990s. The service was managed from a Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) office and staffed to provide a service for all Catholic and Independent schools in WA. It had no reliance on the Department for any services. However, a number of schools continued to separately fund, employ and manage their own school psychologist, outside of any of the three education systems.

During the 1990s the need for professional networking and collaboration for Student Services personnel from the non-Government sector (social workers, counsellors and school psychologists) resulted in formation of the Independent School Counsellors Association (ISCA). This was particularly helpful for professionals who were funded, employed and managed by individual schools. The network was also accessed by some school psychologists from the Non-Government School Psychology Service. ISCA continues today in parallel to but with no formal connections to SPAWA.



In 1997 a restructure of Districts and school psychology leadership was announced; changes came into effect from the start of 1998. New Districts were created, and the position Coordinator/Manager Student Services was created to lead teams of school psychologists, Aboriginal Education teams and Attendance staff. These leadership roles did not need to be occupied by a psychologist. Manager/Area Manager positions with metro, country and systemic responsibilities were instituted for the four metro Districts.

In 1998, new policies with massive implications for school psychologists working in public schools were introduced. Students at Educational Risk (SAER) provided a new language and altered the approach to monitoring and recording student progress and flagging points of intervention. Both this and the new Behaviour Management in Schools policy provided opportunities for school psychologists to assist schools through use of their skills and understandings at the individual student level, at the whole school level and through providing professional learning for schools.

As a professional association, SPAWA avoided direct involvement with industrial matters. However, professional and industrial or employment issues are often inextricably linked. There were calls from members for SPAWA to become more active on industrial issues. As President, Ken's opinion was sought on matters relating to school psychologists, professional and industrial. For a period during his term as President, Ken attended School Psychology Branch meetings with the SSTUWA and informed the membership of the position of the union and the industrial climate.

Similarly, Ken was able to use his connections and meet informally with the Department leadership, at one point receiving a request to meet regularly with the Relieving Director of Student Services. He was also in correspondence with various Executive Directors and the Director General. This enabled him to keep up-to-date with the aims and priorities of the department and ensure professional learning offered to members was relevant to these, and exert some possible influence.

In September 1999 SPAWA hosted the 7th AGCA Biannual National Conference School Psychology: Partners in Education, which was attended by SPAWA members and national and international delegates, including attendees from New Zealand, Switzerland and South Africa.

By 1999 Ken was no longer working as a school psychologist and had moved to the University of Western Australia, overseeing the post-graduate Diploma in Education (School Psychology) for the Education faculty. In this role he was able to contribute to the work readiness of psychologist graduates to enter the workforce as school psychologists. Ken reported he found it difficult to maintain the role of President and associated tasks, while not working in the Education Department. Ken approached Grania Talemaitonga (she reverted later to using her maiden name, McCudden), as a successor, and for about a year he progressively warmed her to the role.



# The Steadying and Stabilising Years 2003 - 2006

**President:** Grania McCudden

**Vice President:** Shelley Hatton

Ken Glasgow and Grania McCudden had been working closely together on the SPAWA Committee for years. Grania McCudden described herself as 'a reluctant leader' and felt that her nomination for President was "a leap of someone else's faith." She was persuaded by Ken Glasgow's faith in her and the faith of others like Coosje Griffiths, Maura O'Connell, Catherine Schelfhout and Louanne Baker.

Grania was familiar with the work that had been undertaken and was aware of the work needing attention when she stepped into the presidency.

Membership numbers remained relatively steady throughout her term at approximately 140 with around 20 being Associate members from the non-government sector and few student members. Membership Secretary, Herman Bootsma experienced a degree of frustration getting members to promptly renew their membership and pay membership fees. As a result, the coffers grew very slowly. For Grania and the Committee this meant a restricted budget with which to work.

Grania's vision for SPAWA was an association for all school psychologists, regardless of their location or their employer. Throughout her entire tenure on the Committee, Grania was scrupulous in her consideration and inclusion of non-government school psychologists as members, their involvement on the committees and ensuring content in the annual conference met their needs. She also wanted the benefits of membership to be more widely known and understood.

Similarly, she was aware of the needs of school psychologists in rural and remote locations. She resisted suggestions that changes should be made to the timing and format of the annual conference, arguing that a two-day conference was beneficial for school psychologists located in regions or districts outside the metropolitan area.

Since it was first held in 1990 at the Murdoch University, the annual conference was located at various hotels, finishing up at the Parmelia Hilton until 2005. It then moved to the University Club at the University of Western Australia, where it has been located ever since. This venue allowed for a greater attendance and concurrent sessions through the use of 'breakout rooms.' The move to the University Club was facilitated by Ken Glasgow who used his position at the university to, "get us a good deal".

The annual conference of 2004 was particularly challenging personally and professionally for Grania. She proposed an Aboriginal education theme, but this was met with a degree of reluctance but did eventuate. Subsequent conferences successfully incorporated this focus.



It was Grania's view that SPAWA was a micro system within bigger systems of influence at the federal and international levels; she was aware of the need to consider the effects and implications of these contexts. It was important to maintain the connections with national organisations such as AGCA, as well as international links, and make the membership aware of the benefits of these links. With that in mind, a brochure of member benefits was produced to promote SPAWA. There was also discussion at the committee level about outreach and sponsoring others working in the field in places like New Guinea.

There were some notable achievements. Life membership was conferred on Ken Glasgow and Jim Phillips for their service to SPAWA, and for some time they were the only life members.

Recognising the need for a SPAWA logo, and in the absence of any suitable submissions for one, Grania designed a logo. She envisaged that this would be a placeholder until a graphic designer could be employed. However, the design was adopted and remains to this day largely as originally developed.

There were early attempts at strategic planning by the Association Committee, whose meetings were characterised by Grania McCudden as the best of 'robust discussions.' These were to be further expanded in later years by Stuart McKenzie and Eileen Kuruckchi.

AGCA had won the tender for Mind Matters Plus, a targeted suite of high school mental health related resources made available across Australia, and SPAWA contributed to the developmental phase of the project.

For school psychology this was a period characterised by the steadying influence of structural stability. Student services teams continued both centrally and in districts. At the district level, coordinators/managers of student services continued to lead school psychologists. Area managers worked with districts and the system.

Work had begun within the Department on developing the Competency Framework for School Psychologists and SPAWA approached the Deputy Director General, requesting that it be consulted. SPAWA members were involved in writing the document, but as Department employees.

In 2005, Grania commenced a two-year term as President of AGCA, and looked towards a successor. She saw leadership potential and approached and encouraged a number of people who declined. It was Stuart McKenzie who accepted and whom she was able to mentor in her position as Immediate Past President on the Committee.

Grania was awarded life membership with SPAWA in 2012.



# The Calm and the Turbulant Years 2006 - 2013

**President:** Stuart McKenzie

**Vice Presidents:** Grania McCudden - Immediate Past President (2009)  
Eileen Kuruckchi (2010 - 2013)

In 2006, Stuart McKenzie had a discussion with Grania McCudden, who indicated she would like to vacate the position of president. Stuart said that he wanted to take on the position, and she advised him to first come onto the Committee. Later that year he was elected to the position. In a private chat with Grania McCudden he admitted that he had, “huge shoes to fill.”

Stuart brought a contrasting style to the role. His entrepreneurial and eclectic approach widened the scope of the Association. Referred to as “blue sky thinking” by Stuart, he looked at possibilities and pushed boundaries. Stuart McKenzie was very much the face of SPAWA, backed by Eileen Kuruckchi as Vice President and a stable committee with Chrystal Makene as Secretary and Roy Moosa as Treasurer.

In 2007 Dr Carmen Lawrence was invited to become the Association’s Patron. She was selected on the basis of her formal qualifications in psychology, her connection with school psychology (including in her time as Minister for Education) and her distinguished academic record. Also in 2007, SPAWA again hosted the SPAWA/AGCA National Conference, Feast for the Mind.

The words ‘connect, inform and inspire’ were adopted and combined with the triangular logo designed by Grania McCudden. The words describe the Association’s aims to sustain and enhance the professional integrity, development and practice of school psychologists.

The Department created a school psychology policy role in Central Office during this presidency. This role was pivotal for advocacy and ultimately led to the inception in 2009 of the Manager, School Psychology Service role, occupied by Chris Gostelow and the School Psychology Service branch. At this point there was just over 200 school psychologist FTE in the Department.

The Association proactively published the document, School Psychologists: A Guide for School Administrators – a guide for understanding the role, function and needs of school psychologists in WA. This was a valuable and easy use reference document valued by school psychologists and school leaders. All three school psychology services found this a valuable document for educating school leaders. Further, it enabled school psychology leaders to work with system leaders to strategically advocate for peer consultation and professional learning for their school psychologists.



The calm predictability to school psychology arrangements (there were about 200 FTE school psychologists working for the Department at this time) when Stuart came into the presidency and for the next few years after that contrasted with the subsequent years. Calm was replaced in the period starting in 2010 by an unexpected massive period of change and reform. There was a huge and sudden growth in workforce (there were 60 additional school psychologist FTE appointed to the Department as a result of a State government election commitment). At the same time, new public school psychology District leadership positions were created for the start of 2011. This coincided with significant operational and office relocation changes for school psychologists and, to top it off, the new National psychology registration scheme with huge implications for school psychology came into effect in mid-2010.

The Psychologists Board of WA was replaced in July 2010 with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA). Over the next few years, major teething issues were identified and addressed. For example, the PsyBA did not believe that school psychologist work met the across the lifespan requirement for general registration. This caused immense concern for provisionally registered psychologists and the services. Proactive action was required and WA led the cause. SPAWA was active in this and wrote a submission to AHPRA about concerns over the 4+2 registration pathway and supervision for psychologists. There was a united approach by the School Psychology Service (Chris Gostelow), Non-Government School Psychology Service (Wilson MacNeil), SPAWA (Stuart McKenzie) and UWA (Ken Glasgow) in relation to key registration issues requiring attention. Correspondence with and input to the PsyBA from all parties was constructive. Chris Gostelow, as Manager of the School Psychology Service was able to express these concerns in a face-to-face meeting with the Chair of the Board, Bryn Grenyer and WA Board member, Alfred Allan. The end result was that the combined efforts informed significant national alterations of benefit to the school psychology profession across the country. Consistency of messages and the combined approach by the professional association (SPAWA), the employers and training program (UWA) produced outstanding results.

In 2010 the first Independent Public Schools were announced. These schools had increased flexibility at the local school level and an ability to appoint and manage their own staff. The flexibility was initially there for schools to either have a school psychologist or to fund another role. Fortunately, after advocacy, this flexibility was altered so that those schools electing to appoint and manage their own had to have a school psychologist. Had this not happened and had endorsement for the practice of all school psychologists remaining professionally accountable to the SPS through a Lead School Psychologist (LSP) (see below) then the future of school psychology in WA may have been dramatically different. In this hectic period of change the SPS had to urgently create and implement host school base requirements for a suitable school-based office for a school psychologist and both develop and immediately implement an equitable allocative process for apportioning school psychologist time across every public school. At the same time, there were other major changes occurring. The SPS introduced Professional Practice Guidelines for all public sector psychologists and The Competency Framework for School Psychologists (a piece of collaborative work instigated in the early 1990s) was launched.





An issue driving the Committee was what the Association offered its members and how to increase the value attached to becoming a SPAWA member. This was to be a recurring theme for future SPAWA presidents.

Under Stuart's presidency, members were given the opportunity to attend professional development presented by star internationally recognised and esteemed psychologists. In 2006 George Sugai presented on Positive Behaviour Support in Schools and Functional Behaviour Analysis. Ryan Niemer presented the VIA Strengths workshop and in 2010 Dr Scott Poland, the past president of the US National Association of School Psychologists, presented on School Crisis Management in a collaboration between SPAWA and School Psychology Service of the Department of Education.

The SPAWA awards were established in 2007, beginning with the Arthur Skinner Memorial Award. This perpetual award respects the memory of Arthur and honours the dedication and commitment of someone who had contributed significantly to the practice of school psychology by "thinking outside the box". Other awards were later established - the School Psychologist of the Year, the Early Career School Psychologist of the Year, a research award and most recently in 2023, the Gostelow Award for Leadership.

A peak moment for SPAWA in February 2012 was bringing together over 1400 people, including many from other professions and businesses, at the Perth Convention Centre to hear Martin Seligman talk about what it takes to 'flourish.' The impetus and organisation for this was provided by Coosje Griffiths. Coosje was a driving force behind many professional development events organised by the Association. She was later given a Life Membership with SPAWA. Also in 2012, the 24th Annual SPAWA Conference combined with the 47th Annual Australian Psychological Society Conference in Perth, giving members the opportunity to attend a national conference with over 1000 fellow psychologists. An amazing experience and great achievement by SPAWA.

But not all things went as well. One lot of merchandise had to be abandoned when stickers with the slogan, "School psychologists do it with class. How do you feel about that?" arrived with a spelling mistake. Psychlink, an online discussion forum for school psychologists and a highly valued resource, became problematic. There were professional and ethical issues and risks associated with what some members were posting, and it became a constant source of concern. The Executive determined at a later point that the professional risks were unacceptably high and that it was better to cease Psychlink altogether.

Tactics were needed to overcome the "Marianas Trench effect." This term was used by Membership Secretary Herman Bootsma to describe the plunge in membership numbers when membership renewals dropped, followed by a steep rise when the Conference registrations were opened. It should be noted that, in spite of this variation, membership during Stuart's term as President more than doubled from 140 to 290 in 2013, peaking at 320 in 2012.



Also in 2012, in the interest of student safety and wellbeing, the Manager, SPS, in collaboration with the three education sectors and other agencies established and implemented the protocol for inter-agency communication in the event of a suspected student suicide. This meant that there was a new role in professionally connecting and supporting school psychologists. The communication process continues today. By this time the School Psychology Service had grown to about 280 FTE.

In 2013, the new position of LSP formally started, ensuring all school psychologists in all public schools were to be professionally managed and accountable to another psychologist, regardless of their school operational management arrangements.

SPAWA continued to be visible and active on behalf of members, as evidenced by its representation on the Psychology Services Committee of the State School Teachers Union of WA and the School Psychology Service Reference Group of the Department of Education.

As Stuart commented in his annual report to the 2012 Annual General Meeting, “Continued growth of membership showed that school psychologists were looking to associate with a stable organisation in turbulent times” and that, “SPAWA offered a stable anchor on a stormy sea.”

Stuart McKenzie was awarded life member to SPAWA in 2021.





**SPA WA**  
School Psychologists Association of Western Australia Inc.

# The Consolidating Years 2013 - 2016

**President:** Eileen Kuruckchi

**Vice President:** Shannon Steven

Eileen Kuruckchi was a SPAWA member before moving to Melbourne in 2000 and working there for several years as a school psychologist. She discovered that things were very different there and realised just how lucky we were to have SPAWA. Victoria had no professional association and school psychologists mentioned SPAWA with envy as an association that gave school psychologists a voice and a sense of professional community. On her return to WA in 2003 she joined the Committee and encouraged by Coosje, served as Secretary for many years, followed by Vice President, before being elected President in 2014.

When Eileen stepped into the presidency there was still much dust in the air and fallout from the massive changes in the Department's School Psychology Service. In 2013 the service comprised over 280 FTE and by the end of Eileen's presidency it had grown to well over 300 FTE. During her presidency there were also massive changes for school psychologists in the Non-Government School Psychology Service. It was in this context that Eileen's focus as SPAWA president was on governance, members, purpose, and processes.

During this period, pressures from both CEWA and AISWA for school psychology services to better meet the expectations and demands of schools in their respective sectors grew. Consultations, review processes and reports were generated to clarify the way forward. There was a "schism" that led to a joint decision to disband the Non-Government School Psychology Service and replace it with two new services coordinated and led by new leaders. The CEWA and the AISWA School Psychology Services were thus formed.

For all of 2014 there was upheaval and marked stress for school psychologists in the non-government sectors. Processes for filling positions in the two new services were conducted, resulting in competition between colleagues. All school psychology resources, including assessment materials, had to be divided up and relocated. New office spaces had to be found. Further, case files had to be separated, appropriate informed consent renegotiated with parents and a process for archiving closed files needed to be established. It was a turbulent period for all involved. However, by the start of 2015, two new services were fully operational. AISWA had approximately 9 FTE and CEWA had slightly more.

Eileen was aware of the profound period of structural change in the three school psychology services and that these coincided with changes to psychology registration requirements. She brought a deep understanding of PsyBA registration issues and insight into the impacts of school psychologists working from host schools. She was well placed to use this knowledge in her SPAWA presidential role. She collaborated with the school psychology services to meet a joint goal of professional understanding and support for both registered and provisionally registered psychologists.





Eileen also brought an organisational psychology approach to her presidency that was focused on people and cultural growth. She maintained a people focus while leading development of a new strategic plan and enhancing operational processes. She compared the Association to an adolescent with a massive growth spurt that had outgrown its clothes. This was reflected in membership numbers which rose to 380, with Student membership rising to 27.

A number of subcommittees were established in the core areas of governance, finance, membership, conference, stand-alone professional development, and communication and technology. Each of these areas represented a major project with the challenge being to keep the momentum going. The highly successful 2012 Seligman presentation had provided a significant boost for SPAWA's financial position, which allowed SPAWA to offer high level professional development to meet the evolving needs of registered psychologists in schools.

To enable continuity in planning and leadership, and to maintain the positive culture of SPAWA as an organisation, succession planning was undertaken. The Vice President would be the "President-in-Waiting", unless the membership voted otherwise, and a two or three-year tenure for president was proposed. Constitutional reform was a priority. The Governance Committee, consisting of Eileen Kuruckchi, Chrystal Makene and Herman Bootsma, with some co-opted outside expertise, reviewed and proposed amendments to the Constitution in line with legislative requirements. These were passed in a special resolution at a General Meeting in May 2014. Rose Tassone, who took over from Roy Moosa as Treasurer, continued the focus on improving procedures. Financial risks were identified, and she set up rules for financial approvals. With outsourced professional bookkeeping support, she set up new accounting and financial reporting with MYOB and commenced online banking.

In 2015 Melissa Morgan stepped down from her role as Conference Organiser after many years as the tireless driving force behind the much anticipated and successful Annual Conference. The Conference Committee began to use the language of "event management and planning", and outsourced tasks which resulted in an enhanced and more efficiently run conference event. Fran Davies was the author and key driver of the new Conference Manual that took conference planning and management to a new level.

While the focus may appear to have been internal, rather than external, SPAWA continued to build and maintain its connections and partnerships with other organisations and became a research partner with NHMRC Beyond Bullying: Positive Change for All Project with Telethon Kids (Formerly Motivational Interviewing Project). SPAWA was also represented on the Telethon Kids Cyber Savvy Stakeholder Committee, and participated in the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Children's Week Forum on Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Children and Young People.

As Eileen said in her 2015 report to the Annual General Meeting, "Following our years of growth and innovation, (aka "The Whitlam Years") SPAWA has been in a cycle of consolidation with a focus on strengthening operations (aka "The Howard Years")."

She had worked closely with Stuart McKenzie as the Immediate Past President and Shannon Steven as the Vice President/President-in-Waiting. This facilitated a smooth transition and continuity of strategic focus, operations and organisational culture when Shannon stepped into the president role in late 2016.

Eileen Kuruckchi was awarded life membership with SPAWA in 2021.





# The Connecting Years 2016 - 2019

**President:** Shannon Steven

**Vice President:** Kylie du Plessis

Shannon Steven was one of many Diploma of Education (School Psychology) students encouraged by Ken Glasgow to join SPAWA. She became a member in 2007. She was urged to join the Committee and did so in 2009. Becoming a Committee member connected with her personal values of promoting wellbeing and a focus on member support and giving back to the profession.

Shannon's enthusiasm and positivity led her to becoming involved in a variety of roles on the Committee, including Newsletter editor and APACS representative. With Stuart McKenzie's encouragement, she took on the position of Vice President and the subsequent position of President.

Shannon was unique, having worked as a school psychologist in the Department, AISWA and CEWA. She had the distinction of being the youngest and the first and only president to date from a non-government school psychology service. She saw her role as her role to respectfully connect and bridge the more "seasoned" school psychologists and the newer members of the profession ("Honouring the past but moving into the future") and to involve all three sectors. It was the connections between generations that was of particular interest. She saw there was a "changing of the guard" with a new generation of school psychologists entering the workforce. This was reflected in the membership of the SPAWA Committee. Shannon wanted to hand the baton on to a younger generation, while respecting the previous generation and not lose the historical understanding.

She continued and "solidified" Eileen Kuruckchi's strong focus on governance and updating procedures and processes within the organisation. However, if there was a defining characteristic of Shannon's presidential term, it was the connections with other associations that were forged and maintained.

She continued established links with organisations to enhance the profile of SPAWA as the peak professional association for school psychologists in WA. This included the ongoing relationship with the national body, APACS. From Shannon's presidency onwards there was also a perception that SPAWA was more considerate of school psychologists for all three sectors.

Further links were made with the Western Australian Primary Principals Association (WAPPA), whose offices were made available for Committee meetings. SPAWA combined with WAPPA to present a co-branded repeat visit of Martin Seligman. Organising the event was not without its difficulties, and the decision to proceed was a significant one for SPAWA.



**SPA WA**  
School Psychologists Association of Western Australia Inc.

The Association continued as a research partner with the NHMRC Beyond Bullying: Positive Change for All Project with Telethon Kids (Formerly Motivational Interviewing Project) and was represented on the Telethon Kids Cyber Savvy Stakeholder Committee.

The Association also continued to be visible and active on the Psychology Services Committee of the State School Teachers Union and the Department of Education School Psychology Services Reference Group.

In 2016, school psychologists from the three education sectors were the first in Australia to be offered access to new, customised training in a topic that had never been widely considered previously - Countering Violence Extremism. This training aligned with new processes for inter-agency collaboration and referral instigated in the area.

In 2017, SPAWA representation was invited on the Engagement in Education Project Reference Group by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, and continuing the relationship with Telethon Kids, SPAWA was invited to join the Expert Reference Group for the Headspace Bullying Resources Project. The partnership between SPA and Mindful Meditation Australia (MMA) was also ongoing, providing opportunities for professional development for its members.

In 2018 the Department, with a school psychology workforce of 345 FTE, started entry via a 5+1 program. As a result of this, there were changes made to the SPAWA membership guidelines and constitution. Membership numbers fell slightly then returned to 360 members at the conclusion of Shannon's term. What is notable is the increase in Student members to around 10 percent of the total membership. Associate membership dropped sharply following a constitutional change in membership criteria.

A highlight of the 2019 Conference was the debut appearance of the SPArtans, a collection of 'psycho-musicians', including Barry Dowsett, Tim Hardy-Atkins and Russell Coleman and Matt Brennan-Jones.





# The Disrupted Years 2019-2021

**President:** Kylie du Plessis

**Vice Presidents:** Matthew Brennan-Jones

Kylie du Plessis was significantly influenced by former president Stuart McKenzie. Not only had she been encouraged by Stuart to become a school psychologist in the first place, but he subsequently also encouraged her to take on a leadership role in the SPAWA committee. Then she was enticed into the Vice President position by former president Eileen Kuruckchi, and ultimately succeeding Shannon Steven as President of the Association.

Kylie's vision for SPAWA was focused on modernising the Association, with a focus on governance. She looked at outsourcing some non-psychological tasks that the Committee members had undertaken previously, such as banking and bookkeeping, to alleviate pressure on the Committee. There was also a focus on "getting things done", and several long-standing projects and operational tasks were completed, such as lapel pins and welcome packs for new members and scrutiny into the benefits for its members, beyond the annual SPAWA conference and the APACS journal.

The affiliation with APACS was established in the foundation years of SPAWA, and SPAWA members automatically acquired membership with APACS. However, questions were raised about the costs and benefits for members, particularly related to a significant portion of membership fees going to APACS. A motion to disaffiliate with APACS (then AGCA) was defeated at the 1994 AGM. In the interest of transparency, a committee was established to examine the relationship and enter negotiations to formalise the partnership and establish a Memorandum of Agreement with APACS.

Early in 2019 the Department ceased the Manager, School Psychology Service role and replaced it with the Chief Psychologist role; Chris Gostelow was selected for the new role and thus continued as leader.

And then there was a global pandemic.

Western Australia faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced the first wave throughout the entire WA community. It brought new challenges and concerns in supporting students, their families and schools. School psychologists had to manage their own personal experiences of the impact of COVID-19 as well as their ongoing professional responsibilities.

The Committee had met just prior to the state lockdown but then had to pivot to a different direction, meeting online and focussing on supporting members in an unfamiliar situation. The Committee made the regretful decision to cancel the 2020 conference due to the uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also decided that the AGM would be held online.



The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the membership of SPAWA, with numbers dropping drastically. It was an impact that was felt in the Committee, with fewer volunteers to take on a committee position. There was a growing awareness of the commitment and time required in being a volunteer committee member. Several long-term members made the decision at the end of their term to finish their roles in the Committee. Herman Bootsma was one of these. He elected not to re-nominate as Membership Secretary after almost 25 years in the position. Rose Tassone, a forthright Treasurer who revolutionised the way SPAWA conducted its business, also opted not to continue in the role.

COVID-19, as well as the cancellation of the 2020 conference, challenged the committee to find alternative ways to support members. From this, Webi-SPA's began in June 2020. First hosted by committee member Sam Wells, Webi-SPA's allowed members the opportunity to hear from members in the field, or national and international experts in topics pertinent to school psychology. Peer connection groups also commenced in September 2020, facilitating connection amongst members online via Zoom.

COVID-19 changed the world. For school psychologists it created an imperative to consider all aspects of our work. It meant obligations to provide continuity of service and support for the most vulnerable students in situations where students were for health reasons sometimes away from school.

Assessment dilemmas were created; health requirements meant standardised assessment procedures could not be adhered to. There was a need for common and agreed professional practice processes to apply for all school psychologists in WA. Leaders of the three WA school psychology services (Chris Gostelow, Dr Laura Allison and Toni Tomlin) collaborated regularly and implemented changes in service arrangements (including guidelines for school psychologists) and strategies to support staff wellbeing. Working arrangements changed and in some cases sub-teams were generated to provide work continuity. Technology was quickly turned to and utilised. Inter-agency partnerships with the three school psychology services were sharpened to allow for ready communication about regular service delivery and referral pathway changes. The uptake of unfamiliar online meeting protocols by school psychologists was dramatic and quickly enabled improved communication and connection. Some of this technology was also used for student and parent communication purposes. The changes instigated then permanently altered our use of technology ever since.

Throughout this period, negotiations with APACS were ongoing, and other strategic partnerships were also explored. In the second half of 2021, SPAWA prioritised collaboration with the Western Australian based Principals' Associations and explored potential benefits and opportunities for members. Of particular note was the joint effort to enhance key strategic partnerships within the school psychology sector in Western Australia. Potential conflicts of interest had to be navigated when Kylie and other Committee members, acting for SPAWA, communicated with the Department, the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) who may also have been their employer. However, meetings resulted in opening channels of communication.

Towards the end of her presidency Kylie stepped back from the role for a period of ten months to focus on becoming a mother. Matt Brennan-Jones, the Vice President, became Acting President. Although SPAWA has no such official title, it was not unprecedented as Kylie du Plessis had been the Acting President when Shannon Steven took a sabbatical during her term as President.





As Acting President, Matt Brennan-Jones organised the Committee into two subcommittees, the Member Benefits and the Member Care subcommittees, with shorter term working groups for specific tasks. This was different from the earlier structure which had consisted of “little pockets of committees.” Both committees worked on providing further opportunities and supports for members, exploring a calendar of high quality standalone professional learning events.

The SPAWA 2021 Annual Conference returned to the University Club of WA after being cancelled in 2020. There was a vibrancy and renewed energy amongst participants that was great to see in such challenging times. SPAWA delivered a multi-modal conference for the first time, and members again enjoyed the dulcet tones of the SPArtans at the Conference Sundowner.

It was a confirmation of SPAWA’s status and influence that the Award winners of the School Psychologist of the Year and the Early Career School Psychologist of the Year received their awards from the Director-General of Education, Lisa Rodgers.

In 2021 the Department aligned with CEWA and AISWA to enable registered psychologists with a suitable background to become school psychologists. This broadened the pathways for entry and allowed a greater number of registered psychologists to enter the school psychology workforce. SPAWA proposed constitutional changes to accommodate this.

Also in 2021, the State government election commitment of 100+ new school psychologist FTE for the Department was instigated. There was also growth in school psychologist FTE for CEWA and AISWA. Interestingly, the State government highlighted that these new school psychologist positions focused on student mental health and wellbeing. The State government election commitment was seen by SPAWA as an opportunity to grow the membership and deliver benefits to members.



# The Regenerative and Renewal Years 2021-2023

**President:** Matthew Brennan-Jones

**Vice President:** Sharon Declerck

Matt Brennan-Jones had worked with Kylie du Plessis on several SPAWA initiatives after joining the Committee in 2017. Both were aligned in their thinking, and both were at a similar stage in their career. Matt had no initial thoughts about the President position until he was asked by Kylie to take on an executive role in 2019. At that stage he was happy to jump into the Vice President position, thinking he would have a longer time to prepare. Kylie's decision not to extend her term as President was influenced by the need to focus on her family, and so she passed the leadership role to her successor at the AGM in 2021.

Matt's focus was to regenerate and transform SPAWA, continuing Kylie's work to turn it into a modern professional association, with an emphasis on raising the profile of the psychology profession in WA. The ongoing disruption of COVID-19 had impacted on SPAWA membership and discussions occurred regarding how this downward trend could be reversed. A Memorandum of Understanding which formalised the partnership with APACS also became a priority to negotiate and finalise.

The State government election commitment produced significant growth in school psychologist numbers for all three school psychology services and potential new SPAWA members. In 2022 CEWA created a new Chief Psychologist position, occupied by Dr Laura Allison, with responsibility for the professional practice of school psychologists, social workers, mental health practitioners and chaplains, a group that now comprises about 180 personnel.

In 2022 the Office of the Auditor General published its report on Department school psychology services. The report raised issues, most of which were already under attention by the Department, these related to:

- school psychologist and SPS role clarity
- school service planning
- workforce planning
- allocation of school psychologist FTE to schools
- whole of service accountability processes

2022 also saw SPAWA exploring and expanding other partnerships, with collaborative discussions being held with ADHD WA, Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation, and the Centre for Clinical Interventions. SPAWA re-connected with professional principal and school administrator associations, in particular the WA Primary Principals' Association.

The SPAWA Executive met with school psychology leaders across the Department, CEWA and AISWA to discuss opportunities for greater collaboration and support of SPAWA members within each organisation. This was a key strategy to further enhance support to SPAWA members.





The profile of SPAWA continued to rise in each sector, with SPAWA responding to a number of requests for feedback or consultation on issues related to school psychology. Matt and the Committee worked towards increased engagement with the non-government membership base to ensure the Association best met their needs.

The Strategic Plan 2016-2022 was due to expire, and the Committee focussed on setting the directions for the next phase of development for the Association. A new Strategic Plan was developed to rejuvenate and reinvigorate SPAWA. After feedback from the members, the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 was presented and endorsed at the AGM.

A rapid change of plans was required for the 2022 Annual Conference after the announcement of the National Day of Mourning for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Conference committee, led by Conference Convener Sharon Declerck, met the challenge and produced a successful one-day conference of professional learning and collegiate networking, with the President's address being given virtually.

Alongside the Annual Conference, the Committee announced the Inaugural SPAWA Gala Awards Night in 2022. The Gala Awards night was initially informally mentioned to Matt by Emily Helmore in April 2021, who had discussed with colleagues over several years about the benefits of a night to celebrate school psychology. Matt encouraged Emily to join the committee to progress this idea further. The first SPAWA Gala Awards Night was held on 24th September 2022 and was an exciting initiative brought to life by a small subcommittee with the support of some Friends of SPAWA. The event was organised to honour the profession and its accomplishments, showcasing the outstanding work of SPAWA members and promoting the importance of school psychology across sectors. It also offered a meaningful opportunity for members to build stronger connections and create lasting memories together. The event sold out and one highlight of the evening was Matt's very well received virtual speech. Matt was unable to attend in person because of the birth of his son, a 'SPAWA baby.'

Changes to the eligibility for employment as a school psychologist in some sectors led to a review of SPAWA membership requirements and constitutional changes were made in line with changes to the eligibility. Associate Members were redefined as registered psychologists with an interest in school psychological practice and the new membership category of Retired Member was created.

Most significantly, the Association began the process of reflecting on its Reconciliation Action Plan and entered a formalised arrangement with Reconciliation Australia.

In 2023 the committee concentrated on expanding the awards portfolio and further developing the SPAWA Awards, ensuring that it comprehensively reflected the rich and diverse contributions of school psychologists. The second Gala Awards Night in 2023 was another sold out event and saw the announcement of a new award, the Gostelow Excellence in Leadership Award, named after Chris Gostelow to honour his humility and exemplary leadership as the Inaugural Chief Psychologist for the Department of Education.

Also in 2023, after a submission by the leaders of the three school psychology services, there was formal endorsement from the CEOs of the three education sectors for creation of the new Heads of School Psychology Group.

Asked about the highlight of his term as President, Matt reflected on the contributions made by members of the Committee and said that it should not be forgotten that they voluntarily give of their time to support their colleagues while still managing other aspects of their life.



# The Present Years 2023 - Present

**President:** Sharon Declerck

**Vice President:** Emily Helmore

The SPAWA Committee has always been an opportunity for members to contribute to the running of the Association. It is also an opportunity to establish collegiate connections and develop friendships. It was for these reasons that, when asked by someone she respected, Sharon Declerck agreed to join the Committee in 2019. She served as Chair of the Conference Committee, and in 2021 she was “voluntold” for the position of assistant treasurer. However, Matt was looking for a suitable successor and said to her, “You’re next.” She was elected to the position of Vice President and the mantle of President smoothly passed to her at the Annual General Meeting in 2023. Also in 2023, Coosje Griffiths and Herman Bootsma were awarded with life membership of SPAWA for their services to the Association. There had been an increased interest by members in joining the Committee over the last few years, and committee numbers grew from 14 to 15.

Aware of a global focus on wellbeing, Sharon felt a need to ensure this also applied this to all SPAWA members and committee members. Both Sharon and Matt were aware of the volunteer nature of serving on the Committee with its commitments and time demands. They wanted to make sure the Committee was not just work oriented, but that there was an element of fun. They worked towards connecting committee members socially. The committee identified a need to reconnect with Life Members and ‘Friends of SPAWA’ to acknowledge their contribution to the Association. Life membership had been conferred, often without consideration of any further contributions that Life Members could make to SPAWA. A successful sundowner was held in March 2024, which resulted in a renewed interest and connection amongst our Life Members and Friends of SPAWA.

During Sharon’s time on the Committee and in the role of President, the biggest change had occurred in the digital space. Post-COVID-19 digital platforms enabled SPAWA to expand its accessibility and reach to members to inspire, inform and connect. The reinvigoration of Webi-SPAs occurred, as well as ongoing investigations into technology to streamline the work of the association, such as memberships and event management. The Strategic Plan 2023 - 2025 has informed and directed the work of the Committee, with the outcomes of establishing SPAWA as the peak professional association for school psychologists in WA, that the role of the school psychologist is valued, understood and utilised and that they are supported to connect and grow as practitioners. SPAWA continues to progress its Reconciliation Action Plan, with a dedicated subcommittee which includes both Committee members and association members with an interest in this cultural responsiveness.

In 2023 and 2024, SPAWA formalised partnerships with ADHD WA and Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation (DSF), providing members with an exclusive ADHD WA membership category, a free member only workshop with DSF and access to discounted professional learning opportunities.

Sharon’s vision for SPAWA is one of sustainability, of thriving rather than merely surviving. Speaking of the 35-year history of the Association Sharon remarked that, “We have the weight of history behind us and the future before us. We look at what has been, but we are also forward facing. We want to make sure that the Association is thriving and impactful, working alongside the employers but always continuing the goal of supporting school psychologists.”





**SPA WA**  
School Psychologists Association of Western Australia Inc.

## The Future Years....

SPAWA's 35-year legacy is a powerful testament to the enduring relevance and valued connections it has fostered for school psychologists across Western Australia. This longevity reflects the unwavering commitment of those who have generously volunteered their time, passion, and expertise to advance SPAWA's work. Their dedication has been instrumental in informing, connecting, and inspiring our members, particularly in a profession where isolation is a common challenge.

We envision a future where SPAWA plays an important part in shaping and engaging in key conversations about the evolving role of the school psychologist within the education landscape. We remain committed to ensuring that the role of school psychology is fully understood and deeply valued by educators across all sectors, and by students, families, communities, and external agencies.

We see strengthened professional partnerships and the delivery of high-quality, contemporary professional learning through our conferences, newsletters, webi-SPAs, and standalone events. We aim to offer members more exclusive opportunities while leveraging modern platforms to foster collaboration and resource-sharing, supporting our community to remain engaged and empowered within the work.

More recently we have commenced the significant work of establishing a reconciliation action plan. In the years ahead, we are committed to fostering meaningful reflection and critical thinking, aiming to support our members in their continual learning and development of culturally responsive practices.

We have diligently worked to stay connected with our members, continually discovering new ways to unite and celebrate the essence of being a school psychologist. As our profession continues to grow, we are committed to seeking ongoing feedback to understand our members' needs and ensure that our association remains relevant and forward-thinking.

Succession planning remains a key priority for our volunteer committee and we continue to seek passionate and innovative school psychologists to join us. We hold biannual strategic planning meetings to ensure that our focus remains firmly on the future, securing the long-term sustainability of the association. We are now more actively engaging with our Life Members, whose wealth of experience and knowledge greatly enhances the work of SPAWA.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all our members who have been pivotal in shaping our journey so far and who will continue to stand with us for our future years. Your unwavering support and active engagement are the foundation of SPAWA's legacy.

### 2023/24 SPAWA Committee





**SPA WA**  
School Psychologists Association of Western Australia Inc.

## References

Education Department of Western Australia. Competency Framework for School Psychologists. Perth, Western Australia. 2015.

Office of the Auditor General, Western Australia. Delivering School Psychology Services. Report 21: 2021-2022. 23 June 2022. Perth, Western Australia. 2022.

School Psychologists' Association of Western Australia (Inc.), School Psychologists: A Guide for School Administrators, Perth, Western Australia. 2010





# Appendices

## **SPA WA Life Members**

- Ken Glasgow
- Jim Philips
- Grania McCudden
- Stuart McKenzie
- Eileen Kuruckchi
- Coosje Griffiths
- Herman Bootsma

## **Individuals interviewed throughout document development**

- Dr Laura Allison
- David Axworthy
- Matt Brennan-Jones
- Kylie du Plessis
- Sharon Declerck
- Ken Glasgow
- Peter Hamilton
- Eileen Kuruckchi
- Grania McCudden
- Stuart McKenzie
- Shannon Steven
- Julie Townsend



# Appendices

## Award Winners

### 2007

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Barbara Tydeman*  
School Psychologist of the Year - *Tim Thornton*

### 2008

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Peter Hamilton*  
School Psychologist of the Year - *Tracey Weatherilt*

### 2009

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Ken Glasgow*  
School Psychologist of the Year - *Helen Thompson*  
Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Suzie Elias*

### 2010

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Jenny Cugley*

### 2011

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *John Hesketh*  
School Psychologist of the Year - *Rica Branca*  
Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Sven Jamvold*

### 2012

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Sue Rowe*  
School Psychologist of the Year - *Graham Lambert*  
Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Jessica Illich*

### 2013

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Jan Fletcher*  
School Psychologist of the Year - *Fran Davies*  
Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Kylie du Plessis*  
Research Award - *Karen-Lee Seymour*



# Appendices

## Award Winners

### 2014

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Alan Plumb*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Yaël Seth*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Jayde Walsh*

### 2015

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Maura O'Connell*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Laura Allison*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Casie Cope*

Research Award - *Sashya Gunasekera*

### 2016

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Gary Williams*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Debra Cochrane*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Sarah Harrower*

### 2017

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Megan Rimes*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Colleen Hackett*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Sarah Heppell*

### 2018

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *David Axworthy*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Karen Lee Seymour*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Graham Goodall-Smith*

### 2019

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Margaret Rutter*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Felicity Watt*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Sophie Mackin*



# Appendices

## Award Winners

### 2020

Awards ceremony cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic

### 2021

School Psychologist of the Year - *Anita Cecic*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Jade Pringle-Sanderson*

### 2022

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Russell Coleman*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Anh Rivera*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Kuscha Botha*

### 2023

Arthur Skinner Memorial - *Fiona Currans*

School Psychologist of the Year - *Geoffrey Collings*

Early Career School Psychologist of the Year - *Abbey Jensen*

Gostelow Excellence in Leadership Award - *Established in honour of Chris Gostelow*