



Commonwealth
activities by
social workers

Activity Report 2023-2024



WELCOME BY THE PRESIDENT



I am pleased to present the Annual Activity Report of COSW for the period 2023-2024.

The past year has continued our growth and development as we continue the incredible journey for COSW. We have remained active in Commonwealth dialogues, including regular contact with the [Commonwealth Secretariat](#). This has included participation in the [Heads of Government Meeting 2024](#) in Samoa and other [Ministerial dialogues](#). We are pleased to have been able to make significant contributions to several Commonwealth initiatives, including the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO), the new Commonwealth Children Interest Group (ComCIG) and the Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance (CHPA).

We are grateful for consistent support from the [IFSW](#) Secretariat which has provided internet platforms and promotion of our events. We look forward to developing our relationship with the International Association of Schools of Social Work.

We made a historic decision to make a major change in our [constitution and governance](#) arrangements in September 2023 and have pressed ahead with implementation. This decision laid the foundation for the continued development of COSW and its growing influence. The new Commonwealth Council will help COSW to be directly connected to every Commonwealth country and able to build on an understanding of needs and interests of the wide diversity of Commonwealth communities. We will be working with individuals and organisations to ensure that as many as possible of the 56 Commonwealth countries have a representative on the new COSW Commonwealth Council.

It is becoming more and more evident that COSW, with its strong networks, is promoting the Commonwealth goals of prosperity, democracy and peace, ensuring that the voice and contribution of social workers is recognised and respected.

Our financial resources are extremely modest but our networks and reach feel limitless! We certainly demonstrate social workers' capacity for creativity and resourcefulness in the use of our limited resources, as you will discover as you read our report. We are sincerely grateful to those who have supported us with time and in other ways.

Finally, I am grateful to all the Board members for their activity, engagement and support and for all their hard work on a voluntary basis. We look forward to involving more colleagues from Commonwealth countries as we implement our new governance arrangements through 2025.

Front cover photo – Oritsé Williams performs a song for young carers at St James Palace, London

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2024 (CHOGM)

COSW supported our strongest presence ever at a CHOGM in Apia, Samoa 2024.

The COSW representatives come from the region, following past practice. The head of delegation is **Dr Yvonne Crichton-Hill** (Associate Professor, Social Work Programme, Faculty of Health, Te Whare Wānanga O Waitaha - University Of Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand). Others involved include **Malakai Waqa** (Acting President, Association of Fiji Social Workers AFISW), **Nathan Chong-Nee** (Chief Executive, ANZASW), COSW Board member **Naomi Spencer** (Australia), **Andrzej Frank** (husband of Jenny Frank who steered the young carer process until her untimely death in 2023) and Professor **Jioji Ravulo** (Universities of the South Pacific and Sydney). COSW is grateful to their organisations for providing financial assistance to make this possible.

During a busy week of activities and networking, COSW presented a delegate-led side event at the People's Forum on '*Resilient Commonwealth Communities: Indigenous Social Work Responses to Health and Equity in the Pacific Region*'. COSW also contributed to a main CHOGM side event organised by the Commonwealth Children Interest Group and the Commonwealth Secretariat on '*One Resilient Common Future: where all children are cared for and protected - Accelerating implementation of the 2022 Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform*' and presented a spotlight session on the Charter for Young Carers in the Youth Forum. COSW supported the IFCO People's Forum session on '*Civil Society and the Intergovernmental Commonwealth*'.

COSW PEOPLE

Key people associated with COSW received recognition during the year.

Oritsé Williams, (see front cover) was named as a Commonwealth Young Carer Champion before he performed a moving musical presentation during the Commonwealth Youth Awards in St James Palace to an audience of young people, ministers and dignitaries, including the Duke of Edinburgh. His specially written [song](#) draws on his own experience as a teenage young carer and drew an emotional response from on the whole audience. COSW is pleased to be working with Oritsé to promote the Charter for Young Carers and to bring the real lives of young carers to the attention of the Heads of Government Meeting at CHOGM in Samoa.

COSW Board Member Teoh Ai Hua was elected Vice President for IFSW Asia Pacific Region.



COSW Board Member, David N Jones, received an honorary doctorate from the University of London for his national and international social work and later received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the British Association of Social Workers.

Former Board Member and former IFSW Africa President, Nigel Hall, was awarded the 'Chairman's Lifetime Achievement Award for Services to Social Care' by the Zimbabwe Achievers Awards in Birmingham UK.



POLICY FORUM

The second COSW Policy Forum, '*the contribution of the Commonwealth to global social policy*' was held online in October 2023, including two parallel open webinars to enable people from all time zones to participate. Both had a similar programme with the same speakers.

Eminent Commonwealth speakers on the theme were preceded by a brief report on COSW activity highlighting a busy and influential year. The presentations were followed by an outline of the implementation timetable for the new COSW constitutional structure.



Janneth Mghamba, Commonwealth Secretariat Health Adviser commented: "The Commonwealth Secretariat is proud of the contribution of social workers. We recognise their crucial role in communities. We need to elevate this work, recognising the key role of social work in basic primary healthcare and in developing resilient and healthy communities."

Matthew Neuhaus, former Director of Political Affairs in the Commonwealth Secretariat observed that "social workers play a key role in fulfilling the United Nations charter objective 'to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom'. Social workers have an ever more needed healing mission to facilitate global social cohesion."

Mario Gerada, social worker and Commonwealth Foundation Civil Society Advisory Governor, affirmed that "social workers have a key role in building trust and non-violence, resilience and thriving in the response to adversity and the management of conflicts."

Oritsé Williams, Commonwealth Young Carer Champion, poet, performer and member of the JLS Band, contributed the first global broadcast of a new video with his song for young carers. First performed at St James' Palace as part of the Year of Youth, it is on the COSW website

COSW President, Sylvia Daisy Romanus (India) concluded that 'the Policy Forum highlighted the essential contribution of social workers to Commonwealth member states and communities and the key role of COSW as a civil society partner in the Commonwealth family'.

COMMONWEALTH YOUNG CARERS CHARTER PARTNERSHIP

The [Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers](#) achieved further recognition during the year.



A pan-Commonwealth webinar was organised jointly with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Carers Trust (UK) in June 2023. Contributions came from projects and young carers in 12 countries, with a presentation from the Commonwealth Youth Programme and an inspiring message from the founder of the JLS Band, Oritsé Williams, a former young carer. The Charter continues to attract support from a wide range of organisations as it becomes more known.

Funding from the Commonwealth Year of Youth facilitated production of a video with contributions from 18 young carers in 11 countries. The video was made from start to finish in around one month including professional editing, background music provided by Oritsé Williams and subtitles. It was launched at the International Young Carer Conference in Manchester in April 2024, shared with the Commonwealth

Youth Programme and available on the COSW website. A short version was launched for Heads of Government at CHOGM 2024 when the Charter was spotlighted in the Youth Forum and two side events in Samoa.

This project has run for around 20 years focused on East Africa and the UK but in 2019, with the aid of a Commonwealth Secretariat grant, the reach of the project extended to young carers in other Commonwealth countries and this was further extended in 2023-4. Following consultations with young people in several Commonwealth countries, a draft Young Carers Charter was launched at a side event in the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) People's Forum in Kigali. This was followed up by further consultations which endorsed the key elements.

The Charter has been recognised in communiqués from the Commonwealth Health and Youth Ministers Meetings in 2023. The CYMM ministerial communiqué stated: "We welcome the strategies proposed in our roundtable discussions to enhance inclusion and safeguarding of our young people by exploring the use of various policy approaches and tools, such as the young carer's charter ..." (Para 25). Work with young carers was identified as a key outcome of the Year of Youth in the Commonwealth Secretariat briefing paper for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa in October 2024.



COSW representative David N Jones addresses Commonwealth Youth Ministers in September 2023

COMMONWEALTH NETWORKING

COSW plays an active role in several formal and informal Commonwealth networks.



COSW is a core participant in the [Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations](#) (IFCO): a COSW Board member sits on the IFCO Steering Group. COSW took a lead role in drafting and presenting the submission of Accredited Organisations on civil society space to CHOGM 2024 and in the IFCO engagement with Commonwealth institutions.

COSW Board member, K. S. Ramesh, has served as Secretary of the [Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance](#). COSW facilitated two contributions to the online civil society forum in March 2024 on '*Actionable Solutions to Building Resilience in Healthcare Systems within the Commonwealth, with an emphasis on Small and Vulnerable States*'.



CHPA Policy Forum Online 2024



**Commonwealth
Children Interest Group**

COSW took a lead with others in forming the [Commonwealth Children Interest Group](#) in 2022 and has chaired ComCIG since its formation, working with Common Protect.

International Social Service (CFAB) provided key administrative support for the group. Priority has been given to activation of the Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform and ComCIG supported a Secretariat online roundtable on implementation of the Declaration in 2023. COSW is co-editor of a forthcoming report on activating the Declaration and helped plan a joint CHOGM seminar with the Secretariat. ComCIG made a submission to the Youth Ministers Meeting and contributed to the Advisory Committee on Health.

COSW supports the Call to Action issued by the [Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network](#) (CSCN) and continues to engage with the network and other Commonwealth partners to ensure 'sustainable urbanisation' in Commonwealth countries. COSW Board member Charles Mbugua, based in Nairobi, continues to liaise with UN Habitat based there.

COSW enjoys positive dialogue with [Commonwealth Secretariat](#) and [Foundation](#) and active partnerships in areas of common interest, including policy on children, health, ageing, safety and civil society space.



Commonwealth Secretary General meets with representatives of Accredited Organisations, including COSW,

COSW HELPS SHAPE HEALTH MINISTERS' COMMUNIQUÉ



*Civil society representatives to CACH 2024
Vajira Dissanyake (CMA), David N Jones (COSW),
Raymond Gemen (CPA) and Victoria Rutter (CPA) with Janneth
Mghamba and Emily Gilmour (Commonwealth Secretariat)*

The **Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health** (CACH) includes representatives of around ten member states, alongside civil society representatives from regional bodies and Commonwealth Organisations (COs). David N Jones (COSW Main Representative to the Commonwealth institutions) was one of the two CO representatives, for 2022-4.

An in-person meeting at Marlborough House in April prepared a draft outcome statement for the Health Ministers meeting in May. The [outcome statement](#) included several references to the wider context of health services and affirmed Ministers' 'commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage by 2030 in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs).

Health ministers recognised 'the interdependency of national health systems and the need for multisectoral collaboration, including social participation and community engagement, to ensure a shared responsibility for strengthening primary health care and public health'. They committed to 'promoting strong resilience and equity in health systems, at the national and sub-national levels' (para 38).

Ministers identified workforce pressures and migration issues as a high priority, noting the **World Health Organisation** [estimated global shortfall](#) of 10 million health workers by 2030. Ministers agreed to 'work collectively to address the global and national shortfalls of health and care workers, in accordance with the WHO Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, whilst considering regional implementation plans and prioritising community health needs' (para 39).

Ministers agreed to 'prioritise the wellbeing of health and care workers and strive for gender equality while ensuring access to safe and decent working conditions, career pathways, work-life balance, and protected labour rights including parental leave' (para 40) and to work collectively within the Commonwealth and to leverage the Commonwealth family spirit to overcome on-going negative impacts of international health and care workforce migration, whilst maximising the positive benefits, including through alignment with the existing Global Code of Practice' (para 41).

COSW involvement in several policy areas means that the social policy elements supporting those policies (e.g. health, education and youth) are made explicit and included in communiqués, making social work more visible and recognising the crucial contribution of social workers.

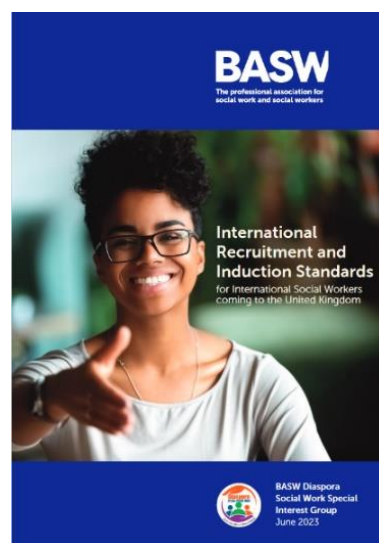
PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING



COSW continues a constructive and creative relationship with [IFSW](#). IFSW promotes COSW press releases and COSW engages with IFSW activity. COSW presented a report to the 2024 General Meeting in Panama and deeply appreciates the support provided by IFSW. COSW also welcomes a developing and supportive relationship with [IASSW](#).

National social work associations vary in capacity and ability to engage with Commonwealth activity in addition to their links with IFSW which is the primary global representative body. COSW welcomes support from the [British Association](#) in respect of representation at Commonwealth events from time to time. The [Barbados Association](#) and [Aotearoa New Zealand Association](#) have given active support to specific activities.

COSW has sustained contact with the [BASW Diaspora Special Interest Group](#). The history and demographic of the UK means that social workers from Commonwealth countries or with Commonwealth heritage form the largest group of social workers in the UK who qualified elsewhere or who identify with a Commonwealth community. A COSW Board member contributes to the Steering Group. The group continues to engage with the UK Department of Health and Social Care and has promoted guidance on recruitment and induction of overseas qualified social workers for employers alongside the government guidance. It holds regular online webinars and advice sessions. Contact diaspora@baswnetwork.co.uk.



GLOBAL SURVEY OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT FOR SOCIAL WORKERS



The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has a research agreement with Buckinghamshire New and Ulster Universities (UK) to undertake a biennial global survey of social workers to gain a systematic understanding of the impact of the working environment on their health, wellbeing and effectiveness. It has been agreed that the research reports can include

a specific report on the situation in Commonwealth countries. The first full survey was undertaken in 2021-22 and reported to the 2022 People's Global Summit; an academic article was published in October 2022 (Ravalier, J., D. Jones, R. Truell and P. McFadden (2022). "[Global social work working conditions and wellbeing](#)." International Social Work 65 (6): 1078–1094). The outcome of the 2023-4 research will be published.

CONFERENCES AND WEBINARS

Regulation of social workers in Commonwealth countries is the focus of occasional webinars launched in 2023. Several Commonwealth countries already have statutory regulation of the



profession, taking a variety of forms; this may include regulation of social work qualifications, regulation of social work practice and/or regulation of social work agencies.

A number of countries are exploring different forms of recognition and regulation of the social work profession, including some or all of these elements.

The first webinar in March 2023 explored the creation of social work regulatory bodies in the UK. The second webinar explored '*regulating the social work profession in South-East Asia*' (September 2023) with Dr. C. J. Paul, Past President, Professional Social Workers' Association,

Chennai, India and Mr. Amarawansa Ranaweera, Past President, Sri Lanka Association of Professional Social Workers. The next webinar will focus on Zambia and Nigeria, in an African context.

COSW supported a webinar organised with the [Social Work History Network](#) (SWHN) on '*contested values of social work in time and place - exploring 'origins of social care and social work'*' (April 2024). Two presentations by Mark Henrickson (Aotearoa New Zealand) based on his recent book on social work history were followed by a live panel discussion with Prospera Tedam (Ireland), Linda Harms-Smith (South Africa) and Sarah Banks (UK) who focused especially on the ethical challenges for social work in a diverse, post-colonial world. A SWHN webinar in September 2024 explored '*social work histories of compliance and resistance*'.



COMMUNICATIONS

The **COSW website** (www.cosw.info) was launched in March 2021 and has been regularly updated with news items and COSW developments (www.cosw.info/cosw-news).



The PDF **newsletters**, published in January and October 2024 are available on the website (www.cosw.info/newsletter).

COSW has **Facebook and X- Twitter** (@CwlthSocWk) accounts and a new **LinkedIn** account which aims to promote Commonwealth as well as COSW activity.

COSW information is widely disseminated by the International Federation of Social Workers (www.ifsw.org), the British Association of Social Workers (www.basw.co.uk) and other national associations through websites and social media.

The annual report '[Commonwealth activities by social workers](#)' was published on the website and disseminated in December 2023.

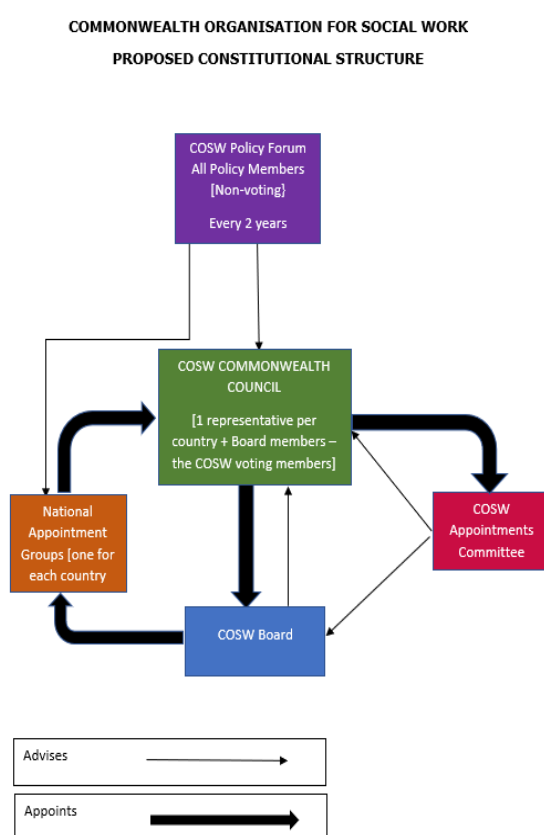


23 **press releases** were issued on the website: deploring targeted ill-treatment of women in local and global conflicts; the historic decision to radically reshape the COSW organisational structure; the webinar on regulating the social work profession in South-East Asia; COSW achievements at Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting offering encouragement to young carers worldwide; impact of indigenous residential schools: commemorating Orange Shirt Day; the open access webinar on social policy & social work in the Commonwealth; Commonwealth celebrating 'crucial role of social workers'; song for young carers video by Oritsé Williams, Young Carer Champion; COSW Board Member receives honorary doctorate; Freedom, equality and justice for all – Human Rights Day 2023; COSW Annual Report illustrates influential social work voice; Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forum 2024 - actionable solutions to building resilience in healthcare systems; One resilient common future: transforming our common wealth - Commonwealth Day; BASW diaspora dialogues: celebrating social workers on the move; Contested values of social work in time and place - Social Work History Network webinar supported by COSW; UN Civil Society Conference in Nairobi; 'lifetime achievement award for services to social care'; 18 Commonwealth young carers urge support for the Commonwealth Young Carers Charter in a new video; Commonwealth Health Ministers commit to tackling global workforce challenges; ensuring social work experience is recognised at the CHOGM in October 2024; Respecting and revitalising the Commonwealth's commitment to civil society; COSW launches associate membership portal; COSW Policy Forum – 9 November 2024.



REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION

The COSW constitutional structure has effectively remained unchanged since its formal adoption in 2000 and registration as a company limited by guarantee in 2005. The Board agreed on the need for a review of the structure to ensure sustainability and improve transparency. After considerable research and dialogue, including reviewing the structure of similar Commonwealth, voluntary and membership-based organisations, the Board concluded that COSW should have a constitution based on a 'trust' model rather than the more traditional association membership model, noting the administrative challenges in managing a global membership with limited resources.



David N Jones
27 August 2022

The COSW Board approved the outline of the new structure at its meeting in September 2022 with a two-year implementation programme to put all the elements in place. The proposals include creation of a COSW **Commonwealth Council**, with each Commonwealth country having equal votes, which appoints the managing **COSW Board**.

The new and unique governance structures and related issues were presented in an open online event in October 2022. Members approved a [new constitution](#) in September 2023 which was lodged at Companies House. Work continued to implement the new structure throughout 2004, including communication with national social work associations and material online. COSW is grateful to IFSW for support in distributing material to national associations.

A global **Appointments Committee** was established to oversee the process. The ambitious new structure has presented some challenges, and the timetable has

slipped, but progress has been made and implementation is anticipated in early 2025. Meanwhile, the existing Board continues to oversee activity.

A new [Associate Membership](#) portal was opened in August 2024, in line with the new constitutional arrangements. Any individual or organisation is welcome to apply for Associate Membership of COSW, provided that they affirm a commitment to uphold the IFSW/IASSW global statement of ethical principles. There is no fee but arrangements for making cost effective donations are being explored.

COMPARATIVE HISTORIES OF COMMONWEALTH SOCIAL WORK

COSW and the London University Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICwS), launched a global project to document the history and development of social work across the Commonwealth, in a partnership with The University of Edinburgh and King's College London. The aim is to develop a bid for a programme of funded research on this theme. A two-day online conference was held in March/April 2022 to identify key themes and potential collaborators for the bid. This comes at a significant moment in social work education, as the discourse on 'decolonising' the social work curriculum gathers momentum.

The proceedings of the 2022 webinar are available as videos and were published as a special issue of the Bulletin of the Social Work History Network in February 2023, freely available online at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/hscwru/assets/swhn/bulletin/2023/bulletin-of-the-swhn-2023-vol9-iss1.pdf>. Further activity includes the webinar on *contested values of social work in time and place - exploring 'origins of social care and social work'* (April 2024) and a webinar on *'Social work histories of complicity and resistance'* with the US [Social Welfare History Group](#) in September 2024. Funding opportunities for the major research are being explored.

FINANCIAL REPORT

COSW has a bank account in the United Kingdom and a balance of under £1,000.00. As a company limited by guarantee, all financial accounts and relevant information is available on the [Companies House](#) (London) website.












Estimated COSW expenditure in the Commonwealth during 2023-4 was less than £100.00, including website and statutory costs. COSW acknowledges with thanks the grant of £2,500 from the Commonwealth Year of Youth, received in 2024-5 to cover the expenses by young carer groups and COSW relating to production of the young carer video in 2023-4.

COSW has limited access to funds and almost all activity is undertaken by Board members and others on a voluntary basis. The Board hopes to develop new sources of funds for projects in the coming years.



COSW networking at Commonwealth Ministers Meeting in London

Commonwealth activities by social workers 2023-2024

Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW)			
Executive Board			
Sylvia Daisy Romanus (India) Chair	Naomi Spencer (Australia) Honorary Board Secretary	Sharon-Rose Giffens (Barbados) Honorary Treasurer	David N Jones (UK) Main Representative to Commonwealth Institutions
			
Charles Mbugua (Kenya)	Jan Christianson-Wood (Canada)	Monique Auffrey (Canada)	Joachim Cuthbert Mumba (Zambia)
			
K. S. Ramesh (India)	Teoh Ai Hua (Malaysia)	Okiria Gerald (Uganda)	
			

New Board Members were appointed in December 2024:

Godfred Boahen (UK – Ghana) rejoined the Board after a period of absence

Nathan Chong-Nee (Aotearoa New Zealand) links with the Pacific social work project.