



1979-2014: ASWB's 35 years of development and accomplishment



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ASWB President

We are here tonight celebrating ASWB's 35 years of commitment to public protection. I think it's important to see what has happened over the last three and a half decades, to fully appreciate what this organization has accomplished, largely through the contributions of a multitude of member volunteers over the years. Each of you, as well as the founders of this association, and the members and staff who have been part of ASWB's past and present are owed recognition—and thanks—for helping define and fulfill ASWB's mission of ensuring the safe, competent, and ethical practice of our profession.

I want to tell you the story of ASWB—how it began and how it grew into the association it is today. Along the way you'll hear about cases that prove the value and the need for regulation. It's a story about birth and growth and maturity.

The 1980s: ASWB is born and survives

Ah, the '80s! Michael Jackson and his *Thriller* album; the Jamaican bobsled team charming the world at the Olympics; the end of the Cold War; the growth of video games and MTV; Imelda Marcos leaving behind all her hundreds of shoes during the Philippines coup; Canada becom-

ing officially independent of the United Kingdom...and the birth of our ASWB! What a decade!

Though social work regulation had existed in a few jurisdictions since 1934, it was not until 1979 that 12 U.S. states met in Virginia to make regulation official by incorporating the American Association of State Social Work Boards, or AASSWB (a cumbersome name if I do say so myself). The idea behind the association was to develop an independent, well-modulated, consistent exam to establish competence. The U.S. and Canada as well were all over the place in trying to establish competence.

While the world was transfixed by events in China's Tiananmen Square, our association was busy building an exam. Variations in state laws were a huge obstacle to creating a national exam, and it took time to convince states that a national exam was feasible—and a necessity. But membership grew as the exam took shape.

By 1987, when the number of television sets across the world topped 1 billion, more than half the U.S. states that regulated social work used the association test, and 42 states belonged to the association. Also that year, Jack Atkinson, father of Dale, began his legal work with the association,

leading to a decades-long partnership with the Atkinson law firm.

Close on the heels of that daunting goal of developing a defensible exam was the objective of ensuring that social workers behaved ethically, legally, and competently. Various state boards requested help in determining how to regulate licensees. For instance, one state faced a case in which an individual said that a licensee had sexually humiliated and violated her in therapy, and she indicated that other women had been treated the same.

This state board wanted to proactively find those other women. The association provided moral support and professional guidance to that board in investigating and preparing a case against the licensee. In a bizarre twist, after the fellow's license was revoked for these indignities, he joined the team of a popular West Coast televangelist and became famous in religious circles! To help track offenders like this guy, late in 1980s, the association constructed a disciplinary action reporting system database, now called the Public Protection Database.

During these early years, the association's first executive director was a volunteer, and the second was a half-time paid employee. The association lived in the home of the early directors, wherever that was. The association hired Frances Goddard as executive director in 1989, and she moved the association to her hometown of Culpeper, Va., where it has remained since.

1990s: ASWB works through its turbulent teen years

ASWB entered its second decade, its teenage years, in the 1990s, when teens adopted grunge, rave,

hip-hop, cable TV, and the allure of the new Internet. As the Soviet Union was dissolving, ASWB was consolidating by purchasing its first Culpeper building and hiring several employees—including our most-tenured employee, the ever-faithful Christine Breeden.

During these “teenage years,” the association searched for its identity. Sometimes that search resulted in rebellion and threats to secede, as members expressed their dissatisfaction with choices made for the common good that were not, perhaps, choices that sat well with the individual jurisdictions.

Members made motions to suspend rules and suspend dues payments. Seven states threatened to leave the association. Some members called for the resignation of the executive director and all the members of what is now called the board of directors. Two directors did indeed suddenly resign in protest. President Sunny Andrews of Nebraska was instrumental in resolving these battles and bringing the family together again, but the delegate assemblies must have been entertaining!

In the midst of these turbulent times, Donna DeAngelis was hired, bringing a sense of order and a strong vision for the exam program, becoming executive director in 1994—a position she held through 2012.

By 1995, all states had adopted statutes and had joined the association, in addition to the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Peace and balance were restored, and the association's volunteers worked collaboratively to develop a Model Law that offered language to achieve licensing consistency

across jurisdictional boundaries.

Even as the Berlin Wall fell and Germany reunified, California, ever the independent renegade, left the association in 1999 to create its own test. But we still had 52 members, since Alberta joined as the first Canadian member. In recognition of our growth to the north, the association changed its name to the Association of Social Work Boards—the familiar ASWB—in 1999.

The '90s was also a time when folks were becoming fabulously rich in the dot.com boom. During this time, the association made a then-controversial move to computerized testing and endured a fair amount of fussing about which test vendor to use. And the association joined the Internet world by getting an email account and establishing a website in 1998!

In social work practice, as well, technology was having an impact. Licensed professionals were conducting counseling on the phone or over the Internet—and members began asking questions about how to regulate this new mode of practice.

Dealing with the incompetent, illegal, unethical practice of social work continued to vex licensing boards. One jurisdiction struggled with a case in which a licensee, for a considerable amount of money, divulged to the media confidential information about a client who was accused of murder.

When the licensing board brought charges against the social worker, the media picked up the story, castigating the board for interfering with developing a legal case against the alleged criminal.

The ensuing discussion was provocative: When we talk about public protection, who is the public? Do we owe more allegiance to client confidentiality, or to society? How do we handle media pressure? These issues continue to be part of our regulatory world.

To help regulators explore such questions, ASWB began dedicating its spring meeting to regulatory education and formed the ACE Committee to approve continuing education.

While the world marveled at Dolly the Sheep—the first cloned creature—ASWB tried to clone effective board members by developing New Board Member Training and lots of publications to assist jurisdictional boards.

The 2000s: ASWB grows into young adulthood

After the tumult of the 1990s, ASWB, as it entered its 20s, did what many individuals do when they hit their 20s: they sober up. They get more focused and serious about the future. ASWB began “hitting it out of the park” with growth in influence and services to members and to test-takers. As the controversial War on Terror burst out of the flames of the World Trade Center, and people increasingly realized that their fates are tied to the fates of people in far-distant places, ASWB increased its outreach to foreign regulators and various professional groups across the globe. We forged relationships with social work regulators in South Korea and Wales, Ireland, and New Zealand, and most importantly, Canada. By 2008, all Canadian provinces were members of ASWB.

Just as many individuals’ brains typically do not reach full forma-

tion until they are in their 20s, so the collective brain of ASWB reached a level of maturity in its 20s. Despite wars and miseries around the world, ASWB forged ahead to strengthen its test instruments and its testing and security procedures. In 2004, when ASWB turned 25, the association administered more than 26,000 exams—and that meant that the call center was working double time. Because they needed more space, ASWB bought a second and later a third building.

As analog cameras gave way to digital cameras in the late 1990s, ASWB continued to embrace technology as a way to serve jurisdictions. The association launched the Social Work Registry, a great service for licensees. ASWB also began processing applications for jurisdictions. They participated in developing technology standards for social workers.

Technology brought its challenges for regulation, however. One jurisdiction, for instance, struggled with a case in which the licensee used the Internet to provide services. The licensee, however, did not monitor the online therapeutic groups she formed, and they ran amok, with members engaging in harmful behavior; in fact, one group member killed herself. The licensee, meanwhile, charged exorbitant fees for what looked a lot like incompetent practice.

The case illustrated the ongoing need for ASWB to help jurisdictions know how to harness and manage technology, which can be a terrific boon to clients but also can present a danger zone.

In the 2000s, many traditions gave way to change, such as widespread bans on smoking in

public places and growing concerns about global warming. But ASWB continued to be “smokin’ hot” as it grew and developed, despite periodic financial problems.

One service ASWB expanded was to develop new supervision guidelines and work with jurisdictions as more and more of them regulated social work supervision. While the written guidelines on supervision did not achieve the popularity of the Harry Potter book series—the best-selling book series in world history—the guidelines showed yet another way ASWB stretched itself in its 20s.

The 2010s: ASWB moves into its 30s and acts its age

The 2010s marked ASWB’s fourth decade of existence. Folks moving into their 30s often feel equal parts of thrill and fear as they face the future. They may start to lose their hair and their eyesight, but young-middle-aged folks realize they are a lot wiser than they used to be. ASWB is not so different: As a 35-year-old organization, ASWB has faced great challenges of transition and of growth, but it is more confident and assured about the work it needs to do.

Though, like the rest of the world, ASWB was challenged by the world financial crisis that marked this young century, the growth in numbers of people taking our exams and buying our products has helped build an account that allows ASWB to self-insure to defend our exams against compromise. The organization has now touched the professional lives of almost a half-million licensees across the U.S. and Canada!

As more than 2 billion people worldwide use the Internet while

fiddling with their cell phones and tablet computers, ASWB launched its International Technology Task Force to examine how best to regulate technology in social work.

And increasingly, the organization has reached out to regulators and would-be regulators across the world. This trend is in keeping with the reality that, in the 2010s, members of the world's civilization are interacting more than ever.

After taking ASWB safely through its teens, 20s, and early 30s, our longtime leader, Donna DeAngelis, chose a well-deserved retirement in 2012. Taking her place at the helm is Mary Jo Monahan, a Chicago-bred ball of energy with Irish roots. She continues to lead ASWB in creating partnerships with both national and international groups, establishing ASWB as a powerhouse in the profession and in regulatory practice.

The staff now numbers 40, and the search is on for a senior manager to work with the growing Path to Licensure initiative that ASWB has launched to help social work students prepare for prudent, licensed careers.

Another exciting venture is ASWB's commitment to develop strategies to achieve true license mobility for our licensees. To house all the staff and program initiatives, and to create a call center that will be able to handle all the calls from test-takers in California when that state comes back into our fold in 2016, the Board of Directors is negotiating to buy land in Culpeper and build a proper and lovely new home for ASWB.

In an era when politicians extol the virtues of testing to demonstrate educational competence,

ASWB's test instruments continue to be valid, reliable indicators of competence. Our members still provide outstanding volunteer leadership of our various endeavors. And ASWB continues to support and guide member boards who are struggling with a decidedly growing anti-regulation attitude among elected officials.

Regulation continues to be critical for public protection, despite political name-calling. One state dealt with a licensee who embezzled close to \$1 million from an agency, consequently sending the agency into oblivion and robbing thousands of clients of the help they needed. So the case for regulation is still rock solid, and ASWB continues to meet that need.

The Future

It's been a long time since many in this room have had the chance to look in the mirror and truthfully say, "I'm only 35!" Tonight, my ASWB friends, you can legitimately admire yourselves and know that you are 35 and you are proud of it: proud of our ASWB past, and poised for great adventures and accomplishments in the future as we continue to strengthen social work regulation for public protection. Happy anniversary, ASWB!!