Sue Mathews Notes:

Welfare officer 1976
How clients were referred to her
Macular Degeneration
St Kilda Road
Moubray Street Office
Qualifications and lack therof
Rehabilitation Department
Camps
Talking Book Library
Starting work at Burwood
93/94 ended education of severely
-handicapped children
Special schools vs special developmental
-schools
Residential camps
Reverse Integration Program
St Scholasticas
Support Schools Program
Rehabilitation Program SKR
Carols by Candlelight
Fundraising
Contact with factory workers
Transition Program
Supported Employment Funding
Pension
Mobility Allowance
Guide Dogs
Villa Maria

David Hunley
Ray Whiting
Sue Fraser
Margaret Fialides
Rory Fraser
Farida Peda
Peter Cronin
Garry Stinchcombe
Mary Pipsack
Reuben Ryan
Irene Sumbera
Jamie Kelly
Christine Harding
Graeme Craig

Sue Matthews
12/07/2004

Interviewer: Judith Buckrich and Michele Prentice

Judith: It's fantastic that you've worked at the R.V.I.B for so long … that's really very exciting, for me. As a welfare officer in 1976, how would clients find you?

Sue: Basically they could self-refer, or they might've been referred by their family, or by ophthalmologists sometimes … it sort of varied. A lot of the clientele was of an older age-group, for example, people with macular degeneration, whose sight would gradually deteriorate, and somebody would mention to them that if they got on to RVIB they might have some equipment that might help … and things like that. So, they'd be referred by the person, or the family, or the doctor or the ophthalmologist.

Judith: And that was at St. Kilda Road?

Sue: Yes. It's no more, where our office was … it's now part of the home next door. You know where the factory used to be? We're actually right on the Moubray Street end … underneath what was the dining area of the factory, so there were just some offices in there.

Judith: Were you a trained social worker?

Sue: I was actually a trained teacher, who got out of teaching. I had a cousin who was working as a welfare officer. The boss, then, was a social worker named David Huntly ~~Humbley~~, who is sadly deceased; he didn't believe in bits of paper, so my cousin just said, "I think my cousin would do this job well (she knew me and she knew the job, and she knew I was out of teaching and didn't want to go back to it, at that stage), so she just recommended me, and he asked me to come in for an interview, and I got the job.

Judith: It's quite a different thing, isn't it … there were certainly advantages in not believing in bits of paper, i.e. you got good people who didn't necessarily have the … you got people who really wanted to do the job; whereas sometimes, you may get someone who's done a degree …

Sue: Sometimes, you've got it all in theory but practice is a bit different.

Judith: So, was everything at St. Kilda Road, then?

Sue: The school was always here. You spoke to Ray and Sue about the rehab department, and I had a bit of an involvement with that, too, because I was relatively young and single; I used to go on camps with them, just as an extra support staff …

Judith: What were the camps like?

Sue: Fabulous! We used to go up to Howmans Gap, up near Falls Creek, twice a year; the January one would just be for vision-impaired kids who had been in integrated

settings; in May, some of those were asked back, and were asked to bring a sighted friend. They were fantastic; we'd climb Mount Spion Kopje, and did all sorts of marvellous things.
What else was there? The Talking Book Library, which was at the front where the Christmas shop is. There was the Tertiary Support Service, run by Margaret Fialedes … I don't know if you've caught up with her.

Judith: Someone did an interview with her in 1991. Quite a lot of oral histories were done – thank goodness – in 1991, which is good because a lot of people passed away just after that.

Sue: Yeah, well she ran the Tertiary Support Service, and they would produce books for students at university. Rory(?) Fraser who's here, and he worked in that department at about the time that I was there, too. What else was there? The shop … the little one in the courtyard …

Michele: … which is now set up as an O&M training place.

Sue: Yeah, and the rehab department took up most of the old building.

Judith: How did you come … what was your winding route …

Sue: It was very winding, actually; I got out of teaching – having done regular teaching, I hated it, and I just thought I'd never want to teach again – and I was quit happy to do welfare. And then, a social worker from India, called Farida Peda(?) came out and worked in all the departments at RVIB; Ray Whiting had actually gone over to do some training in India, met Farida, and was very impressed with her, came back and said: "could this woman come and just do some experience here?". That must've been in the late 1970s or early 1980s. So, she worked with us, first, and came on some of those camps I mentioned. Then she came up to the school, and she ended up staying here for about 18 months to 2 years, when Peter Cronin was principal. She must've said: "I've met this woman, down at St. Kilda Road, who's got a teaching background who, I think, would be good in the school." I actually called the school to find out if I could get a welfare position at the school – just for a change, because I enjoyed working with that age-group on the camps (at that stage, they had welfare officers here, too) – and Peter Cronin said, "but you're a teacher"; and I said, "I never want to teach again" …

Judith: Was this for young adults?

Sue: No, this was for kids from an integrated setting – secondary-aged kids; the ones that went on the camps. So, Peter said: "look, come and see us, and if you run screaming to the car park, we'll know you're not right for the job."
Anyway, I came up, and as soon as I walked into this place, the whole feel of it was so different from a regular school, and I've been here ever since. So that's how it came about.

Judith: So, what do you do now?

Sue: I teach a "Transition Programme", as it is called; it's for the older students – 16 to 18 – and it's generally the last 2 or 3 years of their schooling, here. It's for kids who, for one reason or another, are thought by their parents, us, and them, that regular school is not an answer; some of them have an additional disability, some have intellectual disabilities, some have physical, some have emotional (we have a couple of students with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism). The Transition Programme aims to prepare those students for leaving school, so it's very much "life-skills" based; and it also looks very much at where they're going to go from here.; we go out and look at each student's local area … we look at TAFE, to see if there's a possibility of a TAFE course for them, we look at work options, leisure options, services for disabled people and youth in general. Because it's normally just a small group – 4 or 5 or maybe 6 – we can move out, and we can make sure that they understand and know all about services for vision-impaired adults; we're "all one" now, but we used to visit Vision Australia and Guide Dogs, and just made sure that they knew about all the RVIB adult services.

Judith: And would these kids have been here the whole time?

Sue: It varies. This year I've got two girls who have come right through, and the two boys … one came, about six years ago, and the other one maybe 3 years ago (he'd been at a regular school (the second one), but the wheels started to fall off a bit, because he has quite a distinct intellectual disability. Often, you'll find kids will go through – and maybe manage – secondary school, until maybe year 10, but when they look at VCE, it's maybe not an option; so we've had kids who have come in to do the Transition Programme from a secondary setting … and that can work quite well. Some of them have done part-time Transition – a couple of days in Transition, and maybe done year 11 over 2 years, or something, in their regular schools – and that can be quite a nice combination, too, because they're getting the practical skills and life skills from the Transition Programme.

Judith: I was just reading, today, in the Annual Report of 1993/94, that they got rid of multi-handicapped kids.

Sue: Yes

Judith: So what was that?

Sue: We have kids, now, with multi-handicaps; these were multi-multi-handicapped, if you like; most of them would've been non-verbal as they grew up … that sort of level; it's the sort of level you'd now find in a special developmental school, as opposed to special schools … do you know the difference between those two?

Judith: Yes

Sue: Over the years, we've had some kids in our programmes here, that perhaps are that little bit more disabled, and it's tricky …

Judith: I was going to say … what happened to those kids who were there?

Sue: Basically, they went to special developmental schools.

Judith: So special developmental schools where just starting up, then?

Sue: Yes, probably, because … you always had special schools, and then they seemed to make it into two …

Judith: I thought special schools were just for kids who had difficulty being in an ordinary school …

Sue: No, special schools – like the one in Oakleigh, the one in Blackburn – are basically for kids with an intellectual disability; a special school can be "special" because it's for kids with physical disability or … it depends. There's the deaf school, which is a special school for deaf kids. It just means a school which specialises in …

Judith: Whereas special developmental schools …

Sue: … are more for multi-handicapped kids.

Judith: Now, those kids used to live here. Do they live at the special developmental schools?

Sue: No, I don't think so. It's just the whole ethos of that … the whole philosophy.

Judith: So nobody lives here anymore?

Sue: No, no.

Judith: Not even temporarily?

Sue: I came up here at the end of 1981, when it was still residential, but not for very long. The first thing that happened was that we bought four houses (community-based houses).

Judith: And that's gone, too?

Sue: That's gone, too.

Judith: So where do the kids who live far away …

Sue: They can't come here; they have to come to our … no, Gary runs residential camps, twice a year, and they live in that house … you know the house that's on-site?

Judith: I don't know, but I do, now.

Sue: It used to be the Director of Education's house, so Margaret ~~Hall~~ Bull lived there, Peter Evans … I don't know if you know them. Those camps usually run from Tuesday to Friday – sometimes in holiday periods, and sometimes in term time – and there are two a year … there are two for the younger ones and two for the seniors.

Judith: So, why is the school smaller, now?

Sue: Basically because they pushed for integration.

Judith: So, the kids get a lot more support in the school, do they?

Sue: We have the visiting-teacher service.

Judith: That's from here?

Sue: Not necessarily; it's from the region, but it used to be from here.

Judith: So when did that change?

Sue: It was when the regions were set up … I can't remember what year that was; now there are two visiting teachers based in each region.

Judith: You mean the regions of …

Sue: Our regions. Before that, they were all based here.

Judith: So, now, who is here? Which children are actually at school, here?

Sue: Well, in the juniors it varies a bit; in the junior school, a lot of children will come who are singly-impaired, because we offer the "reverse integration" programme, so a lot of parents think that it would be an idea to start my student in this programme, because it's a smaller group – around about 15, on average – and they really have a chance to get their Braille skills and O & M organisational skills, up, before they hit a regular school.

Judith: How old are they?

Sue: They come in at about 5, and would stay for 2 to 3 years, before they move to their own local school. The other option is to move to another resource base at Saint Scholastica's. This year, I'm the resource manager for Saint Scolastica's for 2 days, and I do Transition for 3 days. There are only 2 students over there at the moment, fulltime, but I'm the resource person over there; in past years, there have been 5, and there has been a fulltime RVIB person there, in that resource base. There's also a resource base at Werribee Primary School.
So, you get those kids who may only stay for a couple of years and then go to their local school, and then you get other kids who have additional disabilities – maybe learning difficulties, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, etc. – who stay longer. When they're in the middle school, which is at around 10 or 11, they still have a sessional involvement with Saint Scolastica's, so they go there 3 times a week, for an afternoon, so they're still involved with a regular school in that way. I think there are 3 from that programme, this year, who, next year, will go to Saint Scolastica's fulltime; so it's a gradual transition for them
There are others who for whom this will be deemed not suitable, so they will stay in the school; then when they move to the seniors and Transition, it is – as I said – more of a social skills and life skills based programme, it is not an academic programme. Because we're a registered primary school and a registered special school, but we're

not a registered secondary school, so we can't actually offer secondary subjects as such.

Judith: So the primary school that is here, is for children who are just vision-impaired, and who don't have any other disability?

Sue: Either.

Judith: How many kids are there enrolled in the school?

Sue: It's only something like … Gary could tell you the exact numbers, I'm not exactly sure, because we always add those at Saint Scolastica's … I think it's something like 20-something.

Judith: That's very small.

Sue: Yes; the schools can allow for 30-something.

Judith: With 20 acres …

Sue: But, we also run the support-schools programme every Friday; Gary can tell you what numbers there are, there; you've got 4 groups which come in twice a term, so there are quite a few kids, and about 15 in each group. They come in, twice a term, to basically to hone the skills they don't get at a regular school – e.g. Braille, O & M, daily living skills, all those sorts of things.

Judith: O.K, so, let me just ask you that sort of strange and horrible big question: you've been here, at RVIB, for nearly 30 years; what do you think have been the big changes, and how do you feel about them?

Sue: I think the loss of that rehab programme … I know that it was hugely expensive, but it was a shame; when people, who lost their sight, were able to come into RVIB and actually stay in from Monday to Thursday night … I think just the fact of being together with other people in a similar situation, was incredibly beneficial in itself, and they were able to have O & M, Braille … all sorts of things, just to rebuild their whole self-image.

Judith: And it was, of course, a social thing for them, too.

Sue: Exactly. It was a fantastic programme, but it must've cost a fortune (the clients paid nothing).

Judith: Well, everything has always been free, I know that. So, is there any kind of programme … do people just come in everyday and do some things … what happens now?

Sue: It's through the regions; if you wanted some help with, say, around your kitchen, or something, the OT would go out and work with you in the home. The same thing with O & M – they'll do it around the home … all that sort of stuff. But there's nothing where you can just come in …

Judith: Because this is the thing, isn't it? I was just saying to Michele, that in many ways, things are much, much better, but that sense of community … the old hard days. But the old hard days also included having the "blind orchestra", and groups of people who are constantly together and having fun, and doing things together.

Sue: There was a great feeling at RVIB in the old days; I can remember the first time when I worked there … the first time I went to Carols by Candlelight, and I actually worked at the Carols, selling candles, and I came around and I saw "RVIB presents" and I was just about in tears … you really did feel a part of this really huge organisation. It was sloppy, in terms of what you had to keep (e.g. files), but it had a heart. At the time, when I was a welfare officer, we had an opposite number at the Association (as it was, then), and sometimes you'd go to the same client at the same time; at that time, they were very efficient, but to me, they did not have so much heart; but it almost came full circle … we became very efficient, but I think we lost a bit of our heart, and they are now viewed as being more compassionate. But now, we're all one.

Judith: Is it a reflection of what has happened in the community at large, do you think?

Sue: Well, we have to get the corporate dollar. Before, we had the old chook-raffle, the auxiliaries, but what they make now, just isn't enough.

Judith: Proportionately. But the amount they make now is, really, quite a big amount, but proportionately, to keep everything going …

Sue: There are so many things they have to have now, like the ball that they're having … no ordinary person can afford to go; it just seems to divorce it from the grassroots support … then, it's just not enough, I suppose.

It's interesting because, up here, you'll notice that the staff are very long-standing – there's very little staff turnover – and it used to be like that at St. Kilda Road, but now it's not the case anymore; there really was a good feel about it. And the factory, at the time, was huge; hundreds were employed at the factory. Our welfare officer was next door, so one day a week, you were rostered on to stay in the office, just to do anything that the factory workers needed: say, they had doctors' appointments, or needed to go somewhere or do something, or just talk to somebody – then, you were there; so you had a very close bond with the factory and with all the workers in the factory.

Judith: So the good feeling remains here, in this place.

Sue: Yes, yes. Everybody who comes here …A young girl – a friend of mine – has just come form England and she's doing voluntary work for just one day a week, here in the art programme, and she said, "it's such a lovely place …". Everybody who comes in – and that includes work-experience students, etc. – generally have a lovely time. I think that the kids feel very supported and loved, here. Kids would come in with their self-esteem very, very low after being in a regular school and having a very hard time; then you'd see them just blossom, because, I guess they're not battling the whole time; if you're in a regular school, and not keeping up, it's such a battle. It's nice in a Transition, if you can see them come in and it's been hard, and then they just … I can remember one guy who came in, and he had this real chip on his shoulder (that was the only way he could survive), and he was only here with us for a year, part-time, but he just mellowed so much, and he became – I think – a much easier, nicer sort of guy.

Judith: So, what do you do, actually?

Sue: This year, as I said, the programme is put into 3 days, due to my other role. On the first day, we try to get them into the way of … taking their own life into control, so we do a diary for a start-off – "what are we up for, this week", "what's happening"; some use those voice-activated organisers, some Braille it, some tape it, whatever; it's to get them to start thinking … not that their mum tells them, "doctors' appointment", or such-and-such – they decide what goes in their diary. Then, on that day, they prepare a lunch; so, just basically learning how to budget for simple meals, buy them (because we also do the purchasing of them), and then – basically – how do you prepare just a simple, basic lunch – in a microwave, generally, so that there is not a problem, because some of these kids have some physical disabilities, too. With the idea that when they leave school, we talk about the fact that they may be unemployed, they may only have part-time employment, there may be times when they are at home on their own if both parents work; at least they will be able to arrange a simple meal at lunchtime, and be independent in that.
We do work education: learning about work, learning about the language of work, learning about concepts of work, how to be a good worker, how to get on with your fellow employees … all those sorts of things.

Judith: You're not saying to me that you only have them for 3 days …

Sue: Three days per week.

Judith: Three days … but they come for the whole year, don't they?

Sue: Two years.
Wednesday afternoon is personal development, which I take across the Transition and the seniors; that covers sex-education, general non-verbal communication, conversation skills … all those sorts of things … anything; it's also a time where, if they have any issues to talk about or issues that are worrying them …
On Thursdays we actually go into the community; one week, we up to Knox Shopping Centre on a regular basis. Before that, they have to think about what their expenses are for the week, and if they need calculators to work that out, and then they go to the bank to actually withdraw their own expenses for the week; once they're on the pension, that can also include board and payment to their parents, so that they get that understanding of …

Judith: What happens with the bank, if you can't sign?

Sue: You have a password.

Judith: So you go to the teller, and you say the password?

Sue: Right. I have one student, who prefers the auto-teller, and he's really good with that.
So they withdraw. I also encourage them to start thinking about personal sort of shopping, e.g. deodorant, shampoo. They start to not rely on mum and dad all the time, so they do a little personal shopping, so again, they need to know how much money they've got for it, and then we do maths within that … and with some of them, maths is not a strong point; there is a range (in ability): you have one boy whose maths is much better than mine, and another who someone add one and one together. They also shop for that weekly lunch, and they buy lunch. So, again, all those social interactions: money handling, experiences, practical stuff.
Every second Thursday is when we go out into the community. Either in the local area, or services for adult vision-impaired. On the Thursday afternoon after Knox, we prepare for that, and we follow up – do you know what I mean? – one week we have Knox, in the afternoon we talk about what we did the previous week, and go through any information we've gathered, and put it into the resource folder that they build up over the time they are in Transition, so that any brochures on guide-dogs, who to contact and where, is in this folder, which they take with them at the end. When we go to a local area, we usually start at their home; if they want to show us around, that's fine, if they don't, that's fine, too. We say to them, "what do you know from your local area? Do you know how to get to the local milk-bar? Do you ever walk to a park? Show us what you know. Do you know where the public transport is in your area? Show us that." There is an O & M instructor involved on that day, as well. Then we usually go to the local council, and I get them to ask for a community directory, so we can then come back to school and look at what's available in your area. We look at local fitness centres; they do a fitness program, here – you know, like a circuit – and we tell them that when they leave school, there's no reason why they can't still do that. As I said, local TAFE, to see what's available, there; where their Centrelink office is … any of those services that they may need. And then, they're asked to prepare a report on those visits; again, depending on their abilities: one can do it independently in Braille, while others may need to do it as a group, or they might do it on tape, or something.
Then, on the Friday, we go to work placement. When they're in their last year of the Transition Programme, I'd like if they could actually have a whole day at work placement, where they go from home to work – they don't come to school, at all. That's the case with the older student; she's at "Waverley Industries" – she started there last year …

Judith: What's Waverley Industries?

Sue: It's a supportive employment place, close to where she lives. Some of the students who have gone on to TAFE … do you know the work education programmes?

Judith: Yes, I do.

Sue: Well, they've started doing one day a week in that work ed. course, in the last year of transition; it just means that when they actually move out, it's not so terrifying. A lot of these kids have been at RVIB since they were 2 or 3 years of age, and leaving is really hard; so if they can do that gradually, it actually works a lot better. And with the younger ones, I'm taking 3 down to 201 High Street, to just work in the factory down there. It's not that we're gearing them all to go into supported employment, but it's that concept of working, in a real workplace, for a supervisor; working for set hours, just having half an hour for lunch … all those things, that if you try to do it at school, it's not quite the same. Also, all that packaging is good for fine motor skills, as well.

Judith: And it builds your confidence, too, as well as relationships with other people. It must be really hard. I always think that to take that big step, is so big, anyway.

Sue: It is. Some of our kids are a bit of a mess when it comes to the end of things, because it's been all that they've known.

Judith: So, what happens if they're a mess?

Sue: Well, I had a girl last year, who's gone on to TAFE, and she's working in Dandenong. She went one day a week, the year before, but … I kept saying, "It's going to be really exciting", but she kept saying, "I don't want to leave". All you could do was to try and boost her up and support her; I always make a point of always giving them my phone-number when they leave … it's not as if she can't eve~~n~~r talk to me ever again, and it's not that she can't visit; she's been in-touch, and it's great because usually they're in-touch a lot, but then you hope it weans off … I haven't heard from her in a while, now – which is good, actually.

Judith: Do any of them ever get lost?

Sue: It used to be … do you know about the "Futures for Young Adults" funding, that was brought in, maybe 10 years ago … it must've been brought in by the Liberal Government, and the Labor Government kept it up; that helped a lot … Gary used to run the Transition Programme, and it was almost impossible to place anybody when they left – there was just nowhere for them to go. The government was finding that, at special schools, they had kids who were 35 years of age, because there was nowhere for them to go; so they actually set up this "Futures for Young Adults" funding, and that opened up a lot of supported employment places … they could expand, employ more staff; those work-education courses … all those things came in. It's been much easier, with that, because they come out of here with a lump of money with their name on it, and they can buy a place. But the thing is that that's all getting tightened up now; it used to be that there was ongoing funding, and I've just found out – because we're just trying to place a girl for next year – when we were looking for places for her, one of the women, there, said, "it's now 3 years' funding"; so what do we do, if we take people in, and 3 years down the track, there's no more funding … so that's going to be hard.

Judith: So that's 3 years for each person

Sue: Yes. It used to be ongoing, so once they got into a place … so you can't run the place without money coming in.
Mary Pipczak, who works at the factory, was telling me that there's a new disability legislation for supported employment places, where the people have to be 15% productive, or else they're not deemed able to work … so that's also going to cut out a lot …

Judith: And isolate a lot of people. That's bad. I mean, it's o.k. that you can get a pension or something, but having to live your life in isolation …
This is what I find is so interesting: in the course of becoming so modernised, and so individuated, we've actually lost this … even though, in a way, people were, money-wise, a lot poorer 50 years ago, there was a sense of … That thing of having things wasn't so important, because you were really spending all your time doing whatever you were doing with your friends, and it didn't cost any money … whatever it was you were doing, in the church, or … it's quite a sad thing, isn't it? It must be such a battle.
Do most of the kids who come, have good family support? Or does it vary?

Sue: Absolutely, because it's a disability that hits across the spectrum, so yes. And sadly, there are a lot of families that break up, so the fact of having a kid with possibly multiple disabilities can be, behaviourally, very challenging; it's quite a test on marriages, so there are quite a lot of single mothers, obviously, left with the kids.

Judith: That's really terrible, isn't it?

Sue: Yeah.

Judith: so, the kids go home every night …

Sue: Yes.

Judith: And do most of them go home to their parents?

Sue: Yes.

Judith: So they're not actually coming out of hostel situations …

Sue: No. But a couple of years ago, we had a boy who was a ward of the state, and he was in a home. But there has not been that many in these kinds of situations.

Judith: And do parents get financial support?

Sue: Yes, there's an education supplement, and once the student is 16, they can apply for the blind pension. Also, in the Transition Programme, because that's designed to gear them towards work and future, they also get a mobility allowance.

Judith: How much are these allowances?

Sue: The pension is nearly $300 a fortnight, when they start at age of 16; it goes up at 18, and it goes up again at 21. The mobility allowance is about $70 a fortnight. I'm not sure about the supplement.

Judith: What's that for?

Sue: The mobility allowance is basically to help you get to whatever it is you're doing; so if there is some work experience or work training or independent living skills training … I suppose we don't tell them that they're actually getting taxis, free, to school. But most of the kids on my programme are also going to work placement, too …

Judith: Are they getting taxis, free?

Sue: Some of them are, yes. They are all supplied for nothing, and RVIB pays.

Judith: Who decides, or how is it decided that somebody's going to get a guide dog?

Sue: Oh, that's really nothing to do with us, that's a personal sort of …

Judith: Yeah? So each person individually decides.

Sue: But you have to understand, that with a guide dog, you need to have excellent mobility… and you also have to prove, to 'Guide Dogs", that you're competently able to look after that dog. Some of the high-functioning students in the past have had guide dogs, but not in recent years.

Judith: Is it because the students here are not high functioning? Is that why?

Sue: That's right. They would need to have very good O & M skills, anyway; a lot of our kids have, but if their cognitive level is not great, it means that O & M is tricky, because if something does go wrong, you've got to be able to think out, "o.k. what do I do now?" … do you know what I mean? And that's where some of our kids fall down. What some of them do have, is "failed guide dogs", who become companion animals; so the family would get, what's called, a "failed guide dog" … they make fabulous pets. I think they do try to gear these dogs to families of kids with disabilities; they're lovely, lovely dogs. I know of some adult blind people, who are single parents, and they've got guide dogs … but I'm trying to think in the last few years … I can't think of any …

Judith: It's just something that I haven't asked anybody, so I thought I'd ask you.

Sue: And you've got to really like dogs; a lot of people aren't really keen on dogs.

Judith: Well, the 2 people that have got dogs at St. Kilda Rd. … they're just fabulous, those dogs.

Sue: Well, you see, Irene came here … she's one that I can think of, that has a dog. Jamie Kelly came through here, too. Do you know Jamie?

Judith: No.

Sue: Irene was on our visiting teacher service.

Judith: I've been out to lunch with Irene … I know her well … or relatively well. It's an amazing thing, isn't it? I find it so interesting that it's changed so much … the culture has changed so much. In the first few months that I was working on this, I was working on the late 19th century and early 20th century, and I was thinking, "it's terrible, it's just so gloomy and so dismal". But then … even though those men were working 48-50 hour weeks, afterwards they'd go out and play with the band, and had a great time; they were together, a lot, and they formed a really tight-knit group.

Sue: Have you interviewed Reuben Ryan?

Judith: Yeah …

Sue: He's fantastic.

Judith: We've had some great interviews with people; it's been a fantastic thing.

Sue: With someone like Reuben, I think that the breaking up of Villa Maria in Donald St., it was just appalling – particularly for someone like him, who had been there for so long.

Judith: Donald St. was all blind people, wasn't it? The way it is now, there's all kinds of people. And he's just one of them.

Sue: Where's Reuben now? Is he still at Villa Maria?

Judith: On Stud~~d~~ Road. It's a big place.

Sue: But Donald Street was great, and it was so central.

Judith: He really misses that, I think.

Michele: He's got all the nursing attendants stringing along.

Sue: He's such a lovely man

Michele: They come around, kissing him; and he said, "I told you I was king up here".

Judith: Yeah … but I do think it's really changed.

Sue: But I think just that fact, you know, I mentioned that my boss, David Hu~~[illegible]~~nley … he didn't care if you were a social worker or whatever you were … he just thought, "Yes, this person is right for the job"; I think that's changed so much.
I've thought about going back to the welfare side of things, but now, you need to have to have a social worker qualification … yet, I have 26 years experience, and I think I could do it on my ear, quite frankly.

Judith: But I think it is true, you know, the amount of paperwork that you have to do … endless reports …

Sue: We used to be able to walk in … no bits of paper, no nothing (because that was a bit intimidating and off-putting), and I would just listen. Then I would go back to the car and write notes and stuff. But I thought it was awful to just be sitting there and writing. So, you became very close to your clients. It was a bit difficult because they would've liked you to drop in on a regular basis, and have a cuppa. And you had to sort of just watch it a bit, and you were basically there if they needed service. But that "dropping in" is a service, in a sense, isn't it?

Judith: Absolutely!

Sue: It was great; it was so varied, because you got all age groups ... I did the Northern Western suburbs ... there were some characters ... really interesting characters.
I placed quite a few people in the factory – people who had lost their sight, and had probably just been drifting for quite a while – just didn't know where to go. It was great, because you'd see them going to the factory and build up their self-esteem again.

Judith: Oh, so you used to visit too? You used to be out there, as well as people coming to you?

Sue: Oh yes. As a welfare officer, you had a case-load ...

Judith: And you went out to them.

Sue: For four days a week you were out, but for 1 day each week, you were timetabled on to stay in, for the factory people.

Judith: O.K. Is there anything else you can think of? You've been marvellous, thank you.

Sue: But it was marvellous, too, all that St. Kilda Rd. sort of ...

Judith: It's just like an empty shell, now. Are there any client service left, there?

Sue: It's just admin, isn't it?

Michele: There's Christin~~a~~ and Gra~~ha~~em,e and that's about it.