



Rotary Club of Palm Beach WA

Bulletin

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

How forensic
psychologist's
mind works



See
PAGES
2-4

Freeo footy frenzy



THE faces say it all. Ralph Cunningham and John Rana looking distraught and Greg James looking disgusted as the Brisbane Lions romp all over the Fremantle Dockers in the dying minutes of Saturday's grand final.

The result wasn't what most of the club wanted but it was still a jolly good afternoon of fellowship, food and a few tipples.

Rick Dawson and Ken Gray did a magnificent job of cooking the fish and squid, as always. There's something to be said for fishermen cooking their catch — they do it right.

Kerilee Dawson's pavlovas were also a highlight of the afternoon.

**More pictures
PAGES 5-7**

Containers For Change — PBR account number C105661798

How a psychologist thinks . . .

EVERY stage of her life has contributed to forensic psychologist Rosalind ("Roszie") Nelson's understanding of what makes people tick, she told Palm Beach Rotary Club and visitors last Wednesday.

Her practice centres on PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), childhood abuse, post-traumatic growth, and neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to reshape and reorganise itself based on experiences) and grief.

Now in her late 60s, she consults for police, the Australian Defence Force and victims of crime. She also works with workers' compensation injuries, anxiety, depression, ADHD diagnosis, separation, death and older people approaching death, through telehealth consultations from her home.

"I look at people's body language and never work with them until they know they are safe," she said.

She has lived experience of childhood abuse and PTSD. And she became a drug addict in her 20s, probably because of work stress. "I was a drug counsellor who developed a habit," she said. So she knows firsthand about homelessness and rehabilitation.

She experienced further trauma in the 2019 Townsville floods. She lost the bottom half of her house — and her business. She was supplying psychological support to flood victims while eating beans

from a tin and lighting her home's upper storey with candles. The experience showed her ability to keep working amid her own loss.

Ms Nelson recently moved to Rockingham from Queensland to be closer to her two sons.

She told the Rotary meeting that she had been involved in working with people since her late teens — first in youth community and social services, then physical therapy and finally psychology.

She explained forensic psychology, her speciality, is involved with behaviour and the law — ranging from traffic accidents to murder.

She started in social work in the United Kingdom, working in youth community and social services. She later moved into drugs counselling and refugees.

She moved to Australia in her early 20s and volunteered to work in drug and alcohol counselling at Guthrie House in Sydney. This was a halfway house for former female prisoners, founded by Sandra Willson, an abused and traumatised lesbian murderer. Aged 20, she shot an innocent taxi driver. She was found not guilty on the grounds of insanity and sentenced to an indeterminate period "at the Governor's pleasure".

Willson served 18 years, becoming, at that time, the longest serving female prisoner in New South Wales. A campaign by activist group Women Behind Bars forced her release.



After her release, Willson took up the cause of prison reform and established Guthrie House, the first halfway house for women coming out of prison. In her spare time she advised the producers of the TV series *Prisoner* on what life was really like 'inside'.

Roszie moved into administration and helped run rehabilitation services for women aged 18 to 80.

One resident was a small, frail country woman who had endured years of abuse from a violent alcoholic husband. She

More PAGE 3



LEFT: club president Donna McDonald thanking Roszie Nelson for a riveting talk.

support closer monitoring. The assessment did not rely on a person's account alone. It examined whether behaviour, testing, and collateral observations matched the presentation.

YOUTH DETENTION

MS Nelson described her youth detention centre work as "soul destroying". The inmates were mainly indigenous boys, aged 10 to 18. She believed children were often confined because of poverty, even when they had also stolen cars or caused trouble.

Many lacked parents at home, schooling, food, housing, and stable support. Some had family members in prison and they committed offences to get back inside. Custody could offer food, education, belonging, or contact with relatives. She saw this as a cycle of inequality and poverty rather than crime in isolation.

The youngest child she encountered in custody for a sexual offence was 10. She questioned where he had learned the behaviour and what chance he had if confined until 17 before moving into adult prison.

She became interested in outside support structures such as "circles of security" used in Scotland. She argued that people cannot lose freedom and basic decision-making for years, then be expected to manage independently on their release.

Her focused on unequal starting conditions, for example:

- A young Aboriginal girl living near her Cairns home at school without the food, parents, homework support, or stable home that Ms Nelson's daughter had.

- Three Aboriginal women

More PAGE 4

From PAGE 2

eventually killed and dismembered him. Her appearance gave no indication of that history. The experience deepened Ms Nelson's interest in why people act as they do and what is hidden behind closed doors.

"It got me interested in why people do things. A lot say 'we would never be capable of doing that' but we never know how we will behave when we are frightened," she said.

She also joined Women Behind Bars to support women in prison and after release. The work tackled lost daily skills and the difficult transition out of institutional life.

An important influence was Roberta Perkins, a transsexual Australian sociologist, writer, and transgender rights and sex worker rights activist. She wrote several books and many academic articles on the semi-nomadic lives of transgender sex workers, and established the first Australian assistance centre for transgender people.

After completing social welfare work and moving into body work, pain, and alternative health, Ms Nelson became interested in the brain. At

45, she began university psychology study and then pursued forensics.

She described forensic practice as partly concerned with heuristics (mental shortcuts which can lead to predictable errors) and bias. Judgements can be shaped by clothing, speech, origin, attractiveness, and assumptions about who is deserving.

She said minorities are more likely to be sentenced to jail.

Few rape and domestic-violence cases lead to imprisonment, though coercive-control laws now recognise patterns of coercive behaviour, she said.

Her court and correctional work included:

- **Court assessments:** forensic psychologists could advise judges and screen court participants for biases that might affect sentencing. Ms Nelson also wrote pre-sentence reports.

- **Suicide risk:** at Huntsville Correctional Centre, she worked in both the male and female sections as part of the suicide risk assessment team. Each morning, the team used a traffic light-style system to distinguish suicidal ideation, in-

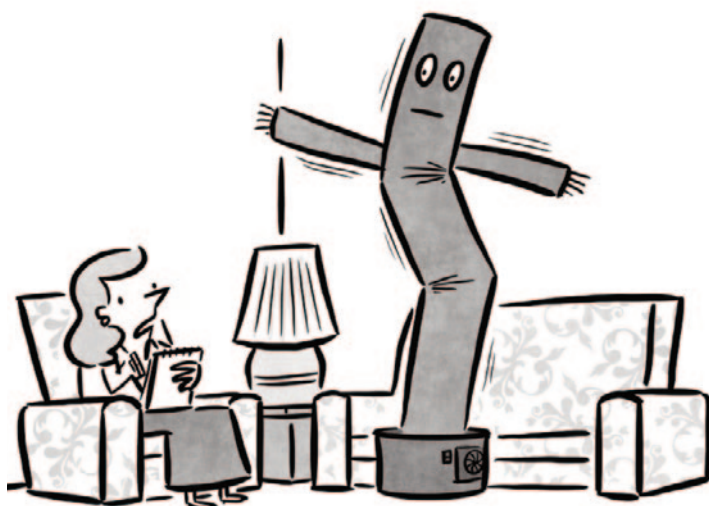
tent, and plans.

- **Interviews in custody:** she interviewed people in lock-up under varying security conditions. At times she sat on the floor and spoke under a door or through a grille. The team then decided whether the person could remain safe or needed another unit.

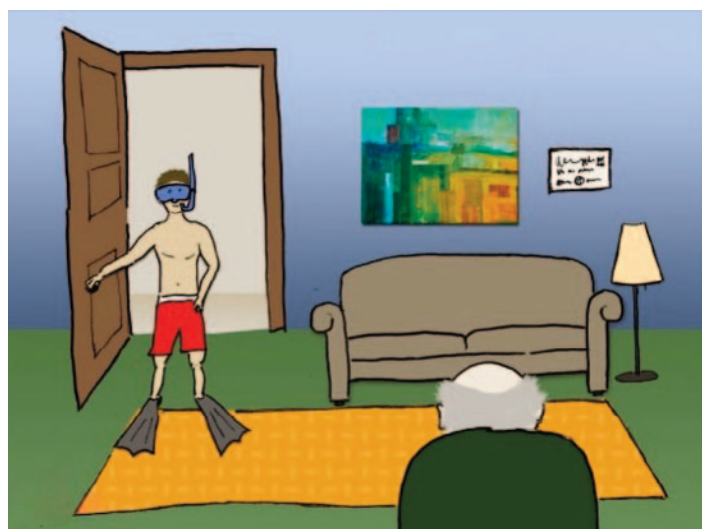
- **Probation and parole:** assessments could extend over months of incarceration. Ms Nelson examined the likelihood of further crime, behaviour in custody, remorse, regret, cognitive capacity, and understanding of the offence.

- **Double-blind assessment:** reports combined interviews with behind-the-scenes observations and testing — PIM (positive impression management) and NIM (negative impression management). A person might present in a certain way to secure release, remain in custody, enter a hospital, receive money, or obtain insurance.

- **Testing and monitoring:** comparing test results with what a person said. Hidden behaviour, dishonesty, box-ticking or psychopathic traits could produce red flags and



"So where do you think this attention seeking behavior comes from?"



"I'm ready to go deep today Doc"

How a psychologist thinks

From PAGE 3

studied with her at university. Family members came from interstate, stayed on their couches, and ate their food. Cultural expectations of sharing left little space or time for study, and many did not finish.

These experiences strengthened Ms Nelson's view that attendance or nominal access does not create equal opportunity. A surrounding support system often determines whether education or rehabilitation can work.

IMMIGRATION AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

SHE has also worked in family violence and immigration assessments in NSW and Queensland, where she was an expert witness for the Department of Immigration. The work introduced her to many Afghan and Turkish women. Comparing their treatment and cultural expectations with her own culture broadened her understanding of what different communities considered acceptable.

MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

MS Nelson became interested in the Innocence Project's work in America and Queensland. She described miscarriages of justice arising from false confessions, mistaken eyewitness evidence, and imprisonment of innocent people. She cited a 1.3 per cent mishap rate. If one per cent of 100,000 people were mistakenly convicted here, that would be 1000

people wrongly imprisoned or otherwise penalised.

She explained how line-up design can distort memory. In a simultaneous line-up, a witness may choose the most familiar face without recalling where they previously saw that person. A neighbour or someone seen at a coffee shop may feel familiar and be incorrectly identified as the offender.

Sequential presentation—asking separately whether it was Tom, Dick or Harry—removed direct comparison and changed how the brain evaluates each face.

Ms Nelson emphasised that people's memory can be sincere yet inaccurate. She had studied how people store information and how line-up methods, evidence, testimony and confessions can contribute to wrongful convictions.

The Innocence Project funds lawyers and DNA review. Later testing has shown some people to be innocent after 30 years in prison.

CRISIS INTERVENTION

MS Nelson joined a Townsville hospital's acute care team and became its main crisis intervention psychologist. The team responded when members of the public were suicidal or psychotic.

When someone lacked capacity and was seriously unwell, she could use a JEA (justice examination order) which

allowed involuntary examination and detention with hospital, ambulance, and police involvement.

In criminal matters, she distinguished between knowing right from wrong and lacking capacity because of mental illness. A person found unsuitable on insanity grounds could be sent to a mental hospital and reviewed. If capacity later returned, the person could be retried.

She argued for both care and public protection. The law should use behavioural expertise and research to distinguish culpability from loss of capacity.

She pointed to a recent American case. A 36-year-old Massachusetts mother strangled her three children and attempted suicide by cutting her neck and wrists and jumping from a second storey window. She was paralysed from the waist down. The murder trial jury was deadlocked and a mistrial was declared. The case has sparked wide discussion of postpartum mental illness and criminal responsibility.

SELF CARE

MS Nelson was asked how she looked after her own mental health.

Top of her list was playing pickle ball five times a week and going to the gym twice weekly. She also has her own therapist for debriefing. Since moving to Shoalwater, she has joined groups and built a friends network and she volunteers on Friday evenings.

Grand final frolics



INTENT: Rick Dawson, Des Mant and Donna McDonald.



ABOVE: the big screen with Ted Curr and John Rana in the foreground.

LEFT: Anne and Charlie Marino and Carol Moelands concentrating on the game

More pictures
PAGES 6 and 7

LISTEN UP: Kerilee Dawson with a message for the masses. Ken Gray is sitting in front of her.



BOTTOM: Leonie Oxley with a bowl of prawns and a pile of paper plates.



Grand final frolics



SAUSAGE ROLL ANYONE? Sue Curr with goodies for Jan Gray, Ann Marino and Carol Moelands. **RIGHT:** Sally and Lyall Pember.



ABOVE: Ben Ostergaard and Rachel Fletcher heading the queue at the table. **RIGHT:** Rick Dawson and Ken Gray cooking their always-magnificent whiting and squid.



LEFT: the club's three expatriate Kiwis, Rachel Fletcher and Tony and Tammi Nepia, with Jenny and Bill Norris nearest the camera.

Grand final frolics



LEFT: Tarryn Fitzpatrick and Kelvin Robinson looking cheerful before the game kicked off.

CENTRE LEFT: the Dawson's' patio all set up for a party and awaiting the onslaught.

CENTRE RIGHT: Charlie Marino — happy as always.

BOTTOM LEFT: Jill Wright looking cheerful.

BOTTOM RIGHT: the audience fascinated by the action on the big screen. The back verandah was dominated by Dockers supporters. The few Brisbane supporters watched on a TV in the front room



in brief



Feeding horde at RSHS Tryathon

A CREW of Palm Beach Rotarians turned out to feed Rockingham Senior High School students and staff on Friday..

The school population needed fodder to fuel their fund-raising efforts for Channel 7's 2026 Telethon. The target was \$35,000. At last count, the school had raised more than \$40,000 and principal Donna McDonald hoped more would trickle in.

PALM Beach Rotary's sponsorship of Rockingham City Council's sports star volunteer awards have paid off in public recognition, club president Donna McDonald (pictured right) said that last week's meeting.

She and past president John Simmons had a fantastic evening at the award presentations and the club was mentioned 20 times.

"I had to get up the stairs twice to present the awards," she added.

"There were 500 people there so the sponsorship of the youth and adult volunteer awards was a good investment."

DONNA reported she had attended the second local regional presidents' meeting, involving leadership of the Palm Beach, Rockingham, Baldivis, Mandurah and Pinjarra Rotary clubs.

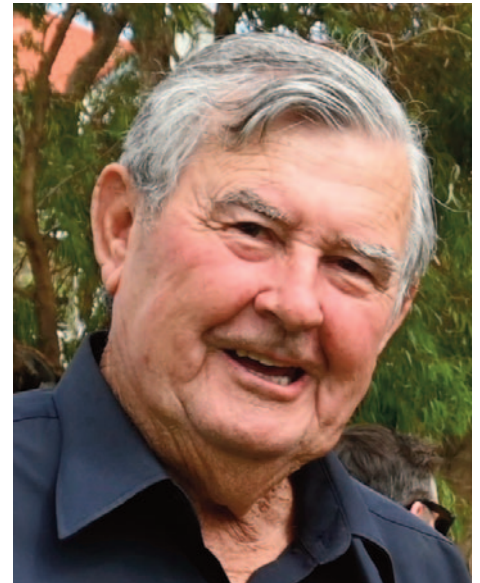
She thought the smaller tighter regions were better than the two regions into which the state was that divided before the recent reorganisation. It made sense to hold meetings for clubs that could easily work together.

Palm Beach stood out for its adoption of the Fit For Purpose program led by Kerilee Dawson — its 43 members, growing female membership and great diversity of members.



PRESIDENT-ELECT Rachel Fletcher reported that a venue and format for the club's Christmas party has been decided. The board has accepted past president Laurie Smith's offer of his home as a venue and professional caterers will feed the masses.

WA Police's counter-terrorism boss Paul Daly was a hit at Rockingham Rotary's meeting on Monday last week, Rachel Fletcher said.



He also had been a very enjoyable speaker at the state conference in Northam in March.

So she has invited him to speak to Palm Beach Rotary Club early next year.

PAST president Laurie Smith (pictured above) intends going to the next Baldivis Rotary club meeting at The Chase on Monday week. "There is room in the car for three other Palm Beach members if anyone is interested," he said. If anybody would like to go, call Laurie.



FEEDING STATION: Rockingham Senior High School students line up for their sausage sandwiches, cooked by Palm Beach Rotarians.



QUEUE: high school students who had been walking, skipping and otherwise negotiating the oval in sponsored exercise lineup for their sausage lunches. Once solitary seagull wheels overhead — the last of a flock who emerged screaming for tucker as the first of the sausages were delivered to the serving table from the barbecue.

light relief

The light bulb: it only takes one psychologist to change a light bulb, provided the light bulb truly wants to change.

The invisible man: when told

an invisible patient is waiting, a psychologist says she cannot see them right now.

The dog: a client believing he is a dog is told to lie on the

couch, but protests that he isn't allowed on the furniture.

The memory: a retiring hippo-campus says "Thanks for the memories".

calendar

September 30: no club meeting

October 14: board meeting and club meeting

October 21: club meeting and annual general meeting

October 23: Liquid Gold Dinner at Royal Perth Golf Club — raising funds for polio eradication

October 26: Salvation Army combined service clubs' dinner

October 28: club meeting cancelled

November 1: Mind the Walk

November 4: club meeting

November 11: board meeting and club meeting

November 14 and 15: Rockingham Beach Cup and Rotary Community Festival

November 18: club meeting

November 25: club meeting

December 2: club meeting

December 5: Christmas party — to be confirmed

December 16: club meeting

BREAK UNTIL JANUARY

January 10: welcome breakfast at John Rana and Leonie Oxley's home

January 13: club meeting

January 20: club meeting

January 27: club meeting

February 3: club meeting

February 10: board meeting and club meeting

February 17: proposed debate night

February 24: club meeting

March 3: club meeting

March 10: alumni evening