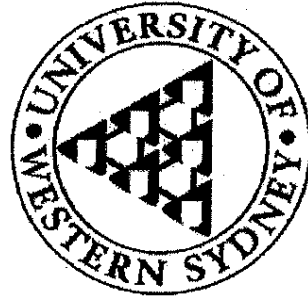


Recruitment and Retention in Community Organisations in Western Sydney



WESTERN SYDNEY COMMUNITY FORUM, INC.

**A report on a study conducted by the
Centre of Learning and Social
Transformation, University of Western
Sydney and Western Sydney
Community Forum**

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Introduction / Executive Summary

This report identifies the recruitment difficulties of paid staff in community organisations based in Western Sydney and explores some of the contributing factors to staff turnover in these organisations.

The process was to ascertain and document indicators based upon a common belief that positions advertised remain unfilled for a number of months, are readvertised due to the initial response being too low, a poor standard of written applications being submitted (that either are not suitable for the position or have not adequately addressed the criteria for the position), and the level of salary offered for the given position.

These issues impact on core project outcomes not being delivered and often the remaining staff in the organisation are required to pick up additional tasks affecting their own work performance and morale.

Core project objectives are best delivered to the community on an uninterrupted basis, however, what is problematic for community organisations is their ability to maintain a specific service while seeking to employ staff, as it is often a timely and expensive process. Of those organisations that responded to a survey, sixty-seven positions were advertised and the time taken to fill positions ranged from a minimum of three weeks to a maximum of two years. The majority of respondents spent between one to two months (26%) and three to five months (37%) in filling one vacancy.

The scope of the project was limited to the financial members of Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF). Members of WSCF are not-for-profit, community based and community-managed organisations providing services and resources to residents. The membership of WSCF extends to the local government areas of:

- Auburn
- Baulkham Hills

- Blue Mountains
- Blacktown
- Bankstown
- Camden
- Campbelltown
- Holroyd
- Parramatta
- Liverpool
- Fairfield
- Penrith
- Hawkesbury
- Wollondilly

The methodology used was qualitative and quantitative data and sampling processes to collate information. Two hundred and ten community-based organisations were sent surveys to ascertain if they encountered recruitment difficulties in the year 2001. Sixty-Seven completed surveys were returned (31%) and 10 face to face interviews were conducted.

Additional issues identified in the report range from the types of positions that were vacant during 2001, the recruitment strategies and selection processes used to look for staff and if people remained working in Western Sydney in their new positions.

High staff turnover in the community organisations resulted from

- salaries and employment conditions not being commensurable to what the position duties in fact are;
- skills required for the position versus formal qualifications with limited hands-on experience;
- lack of ongoing funding for projects resulting in the inability to create a paid position;
- the secondary reliance of organisations to recruit, train and maintain volunteers to deliver unfunded projects that have a high community need;

- lack of professional supervision and professional development opportunities for staff;
- limited career pathways for staff employed in community organisations;
- low staff morale and organisational change;
- the increasing demands placed on employees from funding bodies regarding monitoring and evaluating projects;
- unpredictability over job security and long term funding; and
- uncertainty of how to implement Enterprise Agreements or Australian Workplace Agreements that could assist in retaining staff in community based organisations.

The data collected was limited by the short timeframe (five weeks) to conduct the project, and the period in which it was conducted (mid-December 2001 to the end of January 2002, the annual holiday period for many Managers/Coordinators to which the survey was addressed). However, it has been effective in documenting the inherent knowledge and experiences from some community organisations on recruitment difficulties. There were a number of other suggestions/strategies which came out of the survey and interviews that will be considered for future projects.

These are:

- Interviewing management committee members on recruitment processes, staff morale, and retention of staff in Western Sydney community organisations;
- Examining the implementation or lack of implementation of occupational health and safety, best practice models, techniques, other strategies and processes relating to recruitment, morale, and retention of staff within community organisations in western Sydney;
- Interviewing people who have left community organisations to understand why people are leaving, where they go once they leave, and what needs to change for them to return to Community Organisations in western Sydney;
- Comparing the recruiting, morale, and retention of staff in community organisations with a religious affiliation or dominant ideology to those who don't have that type of base or core;
- Comparing larger welfare/community organisations in western Sydney to those who are smaller in size in how they recruit staff, staff morale and retention rates;

- Examining different positions for example managers and coordinators or youth workers to find out about difficulties that are particular to the job position and level;
- Statistical information on where staff go when they resign from community organisations; and
- A narrower project/s that looks at one particular service within the sector for example Home and Community Care (HACC) or Neighbourhood Centres to find out the problems that relate specifically to each service in recruiting, morale and retention rates

These suggestions and strategies will lead to practical solutions, processes, and procedures to address the topic for the community sector in Western Sydney.

This project was a collaboration between Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) and The School of Applied Social and Human Services (SASHS) of University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the Linkwest Summer Research Awards program.

It is envisaged that the relationship between WSCF and UWS will lead to further projects that are accessible to the higher education sectors, and staff and management committees in the community sector. Such a collaboration will assist them in organisational systems development thereby creating energy and time for future community and program development initiatives.

Research Design, Aims, Methodology and Tools

Research Design

Following on from existing research (Wagner et al 2001) and field observations collected by the Western Sydney Community Forum, the recruitment of paid staff to community organisations has been identified as problematic. In order to investigate the problem in detail, the research addresses the following research questions:

1. Do community organisations encounter difficulties when recruiting staff?
2. What kind of difficulties do they encounter?
3. How do they explain these difficulties?

The research was to be conducted as part of the UWS Summer Research Award program and the partners to the research (CLAST and WSCF) together with the Research Assistant agreed to a pilot that would establish some initial findings.

Aims

Although anecdotal information suggests that the community sector has recruitment difficulties due to, but not limited to, low pay and being predominantly female in its staffing, the survey methodology aimed to establish whether the following issues are also indicators requiring action.

- Isolation / sole workers
- Lack of supervision (day to day, clinical, program)
- Lack of professional development opportunities
- Lack of career pathways
- Attitudes towards the sector
- Pressure and expectations of positions (e.g. crisis services)
- Lack of direction and support from Management Committees

Methodology and Research Tools

Given the nature of the research questions both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. For the quantitative data, a survey was developed (see appendix A). The survey was self-administered by coordinators and managers of non-government community organisations located in Western Sydney.

For the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview format was developed including questions about workplace conditions, reasons for staff resigning, places of relocation,

pay rates, skills and qualifications expected when recruiting, unions, community management, interviewing processes, use of volunteers, gender issues and funding.

Sampling

The survey was distributed to 210 Coordinators and managers of community organisations in Western Sydney. These were members of the Western Sydney Community Forum. Quite a low response was anticipated because of the Christmas period but the return of 67 surveys by the 25th of January 2002 indicated that many organisations think this research is important and timely.

There were 10 Interviews conducted in total. Organisations were chosen to represent a range of areas within Western Sydney.

The following organisations participated in the interviews:

- Blackheath Area Community Neighbourhood Centre, Blackheath
- Graceades Cottage, Bidwill/Mt.Druitt
- The Parks Community Network, Wetherall Park
- Cassia Community Centre, Wentworthville
- The Richmond Women's Cottage, Richmond
- Auburn Neighbourhood Centre, Auburn
- The Hills Aid and Information Service Inc, Baulkham Hills
- Millennium Youth Services, Penrith
- Burnside Multicultural Family Support/Welfare Service, Cabramatta

To protect the privacy of the community organisations quotes will only be identified as Interviewee.

Findings & Discussion

Staff Recruitment

The Community Sector itself covers many fields including crisis services, family services, community centres, homeless services, legal centres, health services, counselling services and women's services. There is a large diversity of positions available within community organisations, as the positions vary according to the role of the centre/service within its community and clients' need, so there is a large variety of position within the sector.

Of the community organisations that responded to the survey 60% indicated they had difficulties in recruiting staff and 67% had tried to recruit staff in 2001.

The most common form of advertising was the local newspaper, the Sydney Morning Herald, followed by the Internet. Others mentioned using agencies, and noticeboards. Most organisations used at least a combination of two forms.

"We advertised several times and we couldn't get a big enough number of applicants, and we advertised the award and I really believe award conditions determine how many people apply..."

Most community organisations, which responded to our survey, advertised for more than one position over the last year.

The most advertised positions were Community/Health workers. These include people who work with disability, youth, outreach workers, community development and a variety of these types of positions.

The table below indicates the positions advertised and the number of surveys that mentioned trying to recruit them.

Table 1: Advertised Positions

Position category	The number of surveys mentioning
Admin	3
Managers/Coordinators	8
Educational Professionals	3
Community/Health workers	19
Other	2
Admin & Managers	2
Admin & Community/Health Workers	5
Managers & Community/Health Workers	2
Admin & Management & Community/Health Workers	1
Admin & Education & Community/Health Workers	2
Total	47
n/a	20
	67

A major difficulty in recruitment is how long it can take to find the right person for the vacancy with the majority taking 3 to 5 months.

Table 2: Time Taken to Fill Positions

Time taken to fill advertised position	Frequency	Percent
1-3 weeks	6	17
1-2 months	9	26
3-5 months	13	37
6-12 months	5	14
13-24 months	2	6
Total	35	100
n/a	32	
	67	

Due to lack of staff, 2 organisations reported that they were not able to remain open during the time it took to find the right person to fill the vacancy/ies and 10 organisations were unable to offer all their services to clients. Services also mentioned as being effected by shortage of staff were administration, financial, counselling and allied health services. Projects and activities were postponed or cancelled or run by staff not employed or skilled to do the task.

Many community organisations specified that they advertised more than once for the positions. The following is a list of strategies that were implemented to overcome difficulties in recruiting staff and how many organisations implemented these strategies.

Table 3: Recruitment Strategies

Strategy	Number of surveys that mentioned
Advertise further/wider	9
Redesign advertisement	4
Consult management/meetings	2
Offer flexible contracts	3
Review job/improve conditions	3
Offer training	2
Provide extra hours for current staff	2
Other	4
Readvertise & consult management committee	2
Readvertise & offer training	1
Review job & offer training	1
Total	33
n/a	34
Overall total	67

In examining recruitment and retention in community organisations it is important to find out what qualities, skills and qualifications the sector is seeking.

Staff Turn Over

According to the survey 27% of organisations reported a high turnover rate within their community organisation. In the survey one organisation with 7 employees indicated they had a complete staff turn around within a 12 months period.

Of the 67 surveyed, the main reasons for staff leaving were maternity leave, pay and stressful working conditions. Other factors included location, limited career development, study leave, retirement and project completion.

Due to the high amount of community organisations that have employed staff in 2001 67% it appears that people who have been working in a community organisation are now relocating. This implies that recruitment and retention of staff are significant issues in the sector.

Requirements for Employment

Due to the many different community organisations and diverse number of roles, the information from the surveys cannot simply be correlated. The question on the surveys was for the qualifications required. These are the main points from the information.

- Qualifications in welfare, social sciences or related area or qualifications in the area the job is in, e.g. counselling qualifications
- Experience in a similar position was often specified especially for positions in management.
- Drivers Licence was specified for many positions and own transport was required for some especially in relation to outreach workers.

In most interviews staff were asked what they would require in terms of personal qualities, skills and qualifications when recruiting a general employee. One coordinator talked about the issue that the sector is moving more towards employing staff based on qualifications rather than skills.

The following are some of the responses from interviews

- Commitment to Social Justice
- Initiative
- Someone who is equally comfortable working on their own as they are working as part of a team.
- Adaptable, able to make change and adapt to a changing environment
- Interested in personal growth
- Active Learner
- Communication Skills

The importance of communication skills was mentioned in most interviews usually as the most important skill/quality.

- Interpersonal skills.
- Community Development skills
- Group work skills
- Facilitation Skills
- Cross-cultural awareness
- At least TAFE certificate III in youth work or welfare. (Dealing with a youth worker position.), another said for a senior youth work position a social science degree was required
- Relevant qualifications are mandatory for positions such as Counsellor for example a degree in Social Work or Psychology.
- One community organisation acknowledges life experience for positions in welfare.
- One organisation specified a degree or the equivalent experience.

The importance of the personality of the individual was expressed as a very important aspect in recruiting staff and specified during interviews. One interviewee in particular stated that it was important to wait for someone with the right attitudes rather than employ someone just to have staff needed.

"I believe skills and technical knowledge and how to do the job can be taught. I do not think attitudes, personality, motivation can be taught so I would interview based on behavioural personal specifications... definitely it's about the person not their technical skills.

Selection Process

Most community organisations selection procedure was conducted by an interview panel with members of the management committee, and commonly the coordinator/manager and sometimes an independent person was mentioned. A few times it was also mentioned that two interviews would take place, the first being with the coordinator. The structure of the interview process differs by the size of the organisation and type also.

"I set up this process I get applications first on paper I tend to do this fairly structured and without sounding too negative that doesn't seem what this industry usually does because they are used to doing this as quickly and cheaply as possible."

"Some positions are higher like senior manager that has to be done by the CEO and the HR manager and a board member. At my level it would be CEO and another manager and an independent. (We have) very good EEO. At coordinator level it would be me and my regional director, at worker level it would be the coordinator, sometimes they would organise themselves and I would give them authority to do it I don't want to be involved, but often it requires some special skill and if I am concerned about it I will be involved. At the lower level, we make the recommendation and send it off to Senior Manager and HR and it's approved."

Leave

The Social and Community Services (State) Award do not have any provisions for paid parental leave or study leave at present.

One of the most common conditions requested in the survey and interviews was paid maternity/parental leave.

“Given that most of the people who work in the sector are women, and it suits them because it’s part time I think paid parental leave should be there.”

Many organisations do want to grant some provisions for paid parental leave, but funding often complicated this matter.

Some organisations have no funding to pay for parental leave as the funding has to go into the wages of the employee who takes that position during the time the staff member is on parental leave which can be up to a year.

Currently the SACS Award complies only with state regulations of up to the child’s first birthday to be granted as unpaid parental leave if requested by the employee who will be the primary carer (Cited Industrial Act 1996, NSW)

Only one organisation interviewed grants paid maternity/parental leave to staff already.

In interviews it was discovered that many organisations gave assistance in the form of study leave to employees in hope of retaining skilled staff members and up-skill staff they have. Assistance can be expensive to organisations that either have to fill the vacancy during that time, give more work to other existing staff, increase staff members hours or have less services offered to the clients.

In the survey it was indicated that two staff resigned due to an absence of study leave, and one organisation interviewed stated that many of their staff leave to commence study and are re-employed later at a higher rate of pay.

Pay and Awards

The major issue that effects both recruitment and retention of staff is pay.

Almost 90% of the community organisation surveyed and interviewed indicated improvements to pay would assist in the recruitment and retention of staff in community organisations. 65% of subjects surveyed identified pay rates as the main priority that will assist retention and recruitment of staff. This will probably come as no surprise to people working in community organisations.

According to the survey 12% of organisations indicated pay as the main reason for their recruitment difficulties and a further 4% related it specifically to the awards pay rates.

Pay could also explain in part the low number of applicants and appropriately skilled applicants applying for advertised positions. Most Coordinators/Managers interviewed stated pay as one of the reasons they believe that they do not get high levels of applicants applying for positions. Two interviewees stated that community services needs wages to be competitive with the private sector and government to retain and recruit staff.

One Coordinator interviewed stated that staff could not afford to live on the pay for part-time positions if they were paid according to the Social and Community Services (State) Award.

Another Coordinator stated that eventually everyone gets sick of being stuck on the SACS award. Only one organisation interviewed stated that the new award was adequate; most expressed the view that any salary raise was better than none, but it still was not fair for the level of responsibility required.

"If I was in any other sector other than this for the level of responsibility I would be paid at about twice the salary even with the new award I think it is appalling."

"The new Award isn't adequate for the work that is done and if it is ever increasing accreditations and standards and we are asking staff to have much more qualifications we are not backing it up with money and conditions."

The survey found that 89% of organisations employ staff under SACS Award. Other awards include the Clerical Award (12%) and some staff are employed under the Miscellaneous Childcare/Kindergarten Workers Award, the Miscellaneous Home Care Workers Award and the Miscellaneous Workers Award. There was also a small list of other awards for staff with particular skills not usually welfare related such as the Motor Bus Drivers Conductors Award.

Enterprise Agreements were indicated as being held by only 17 Community Organisations who responded to the survey but some others indicated that this was something they would look at in the future. This would allow for staff to receive pay and conditions over and above the Award.

Overall, it was found that community services are not paid justly when considering the skill and/or training required and the level of responsibility staff which in turn effects recruitment and turnover rates. This is a complex issue that also involves funding bodies to value the work according to how it would be valued elsewhere.

Time in Lieu and Case Loads

Most community organisations currently have time in lieu as per SACS Award. During interviews it was often stated that it accrues so much that it becomes almost impossible to take. One interviewee stated, "It would be like taking long service leave". Therefore people are often not compensated for their commitment to their job and the hours they work. Many staff lose time in lieu or give it away because their management committees do not allow it to go up indefinitely if not taken. Time in lieu does not make up for the non-business hours spent away from family.

From interviews it was discovered that many staff work a large amount of hours that is not compensated for. People often do more hours then they are officially required to do to get everything done.

"I get paid for a 35-hour week so I should be doing 70-hour fortnight but commonly I do an 80-85 hour fortnight and occasionally it can go up to 120 hours like I did last

fortnight and that's not just me all our staff work outside standard working hours for instance here we can't have a lunch break because how can we say no to people who come in sorry I am on my lunch break."

"The management (committee), government and community like the fact we produce lots of output and we produce lots of output because we don't work within the limited hours we are funded for, but if we were truly instructed to cut back our hours we couldn't do half of what we do, or be as visible as we are."

Two organisations interviewed specified that time in lieu worked most effectively when taken within the month of accrual, to prevent it accumulating and therefore being lost and also to ensure that employees are not overworked.

Most organisations interviewed also said they would like to see overtime rates be made available (which is now part of the Award). The problem of paying overtime was funding. One stated that this would be unfeasible due to the hours and caseloads of people in the position of community development work. One organisation interviewed said they needed to have effective time management in place so people didn't accrue hours of time in lieu while being non-productive and that overtime rates of pay could be open to exploitation by some employees.

In interviews community organisation Coordinators often remarked that they would take on more projects if there was more time but already their caseloads are very full.

"I often don't take on things that need to be done purely because of my workload and I think that's true of community organisational welfare."

Many positions were part-time and this also encourages people to work more hours to get the work done.

Their needs to be ways to acknowledge and appreciate the unpaid labour of people working in the community sector.

"I don't mind putting in some overtime because I like my job, but I think it should be recognised and appreciated and I get a strong feeling that government lays more and more back on the community sector and more and more back on charities with ever increasing input of volunteers without acknowledging that. I don't think the community really appreciate (it) the government seems to view this sector as the warm and fuzzy sector, and not a real thing and you are dealing with peoples lives you can't get more real."

Funding

According to the survey 46% of the organisations said they had funding problems and 67% said funding specifically effects the recruitment of staff. Funding also was reason given for staff leaving.

One organisation specified that one staff member and 38 volunteers ran the organisation and there was no funding for another staff member.

The main funding bodies were Department of Community Services followed by Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. Others included Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Legal Aid, Department of Family and Community Services. Of 67 organisations only 1 organisation reported to have donations from the private sector and 2 were self-funded.

Many community organisations do not have the funding to offer above award conditions that would assist in attracting and retaining staff.

According to the survey, the shortage of funding effects the availability of advertised positions. Several mentioned that the only jobs they could fund were based on project duration and short term/flexible contracts and casual staff. Such short-term positions reduce job security and would discourage potential applicants, especially those seeking stability and job permanence.

Many of the community organisations interviewed said they would take on more projects and different types of projects if funding were available.

In one interview it was raised that for smaller organisations, advertising is a significant expense. Some organisations specified in the survey that they had to advertise more than once to find a large enough field of applicants to interview.

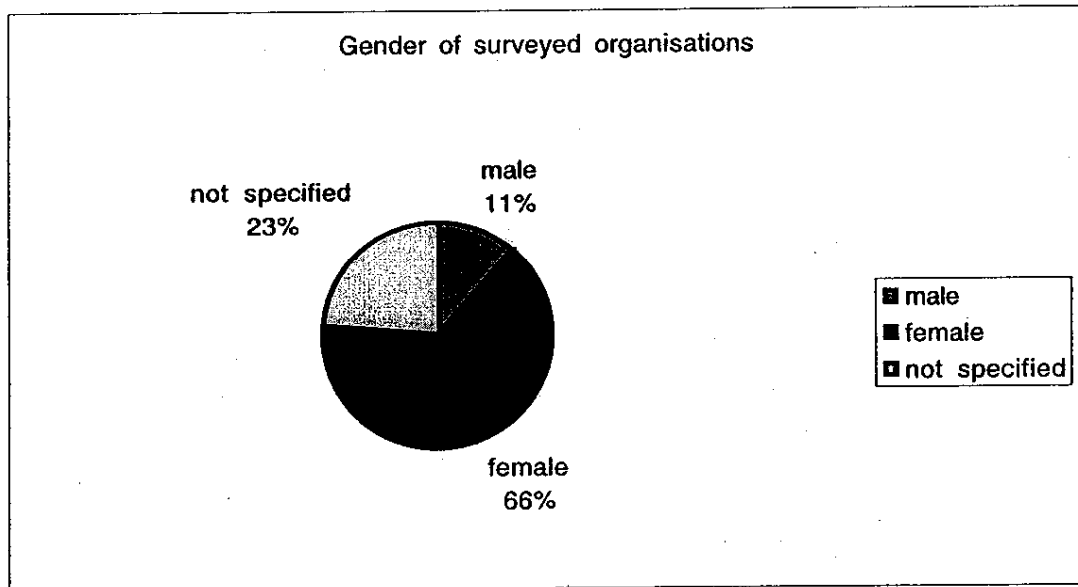
Two community organisations talked about doing work in partnership with other community organisations to share resources including staff hours and funding to overcome these difficulties.

At the Teamwest conference in 2001 around 12 community facilities were identified as having no funds to employ necessary staff by attendees to the conference. In reality the number is probably significantly greater. Many centres are run purely by volunteers who want to contribute to their community but have difficulty getting funding for projects or the required/trained staff for those projects.

Gender

Most people employed in community organisations are female. From the 67 community organisations who returned surveys there were 950 staff members in total, with 619 specified as being female and 109 specified as male.

Graph 1 Proportion of gender in community services



In interviews it was said that the predominance of female employees is due to women having traditionally worked in human services at a grass roots level. Other reasons given were that women are socialised into caring roles within our society and that in the past people have been employed by having life experience gained in family duties. Additionally, the part-time hours attract more women than men (especially those with family responsibilities). It was also stated that men often go to positions of better pay.

A feminist critique of the sector would say that at least in part the reason the pay and conditions are so low in comparison to other fields is because society undervalues the labour of women. Equal pay for equal work has little meaning in the areas women are attracted to. Our society does not pay or value these areas according to the contribution the professions make to our society.

Another factor in gender was that it was difficult to fill positions where staff had taken maternity/parental leave due to the short-term nature of the work.

According to the results of our survey men make up less than a quarter of people employed in the sector. Due to a shortage of staff with community organisations there is a need to recruit more skilled staff including males. Suggestions made during

interviews to encourage males into the sector were predominantly better pay and changing the way our society views professions in community organisations.

Career Pathways

The lack of career paths in the community services sector is an issue that affects both recruitment and retention.

In the survey it was found that difficulties in recruitment was also attributed to casual or short-term positions only being made available, consequently effecting career prospects.

A factor of attracting people to apply for positions is the chance of promotion and advancement up the career ladder and job permanence, which is made more difficult if there is a limited time to gain experience and establish worth within the organisation. The other factor that makes community jobs undervalued and less attractive is the Social and Community Services (State) Award. The Grade of the position is what the project is funded for rarely changes. There are few yearly increment rates to advance many people who consequently remain stuck on the same rates of pay and task level regardless of further qualifications or many years experience. This may cause an employee to change positions or organisations as regularly as they can. Many qualify for the higher jobs but remain stuck at the same level of pay which may consequently reduce the retention rate within the field. It is also not possible to promote a worker over their award even for outstanding performance unless the position and funding can be changed. This may effect the level of motivation and make staff feel undervalued. This may explain, in part, why so many staff moves from one community organisation to another.

“You can be energetic and effective here but there is still no career path because you are only funded for that position and that means no matter what you do you can't earn a higher salary in the same position. A lot of our staff go to the top of their increment and if they want to keep working for the neighbourhood centre that's where they end up because we can't create another worker position because we aren't funded for a different position.”

In larger community organisations, where there are positions at higher grades, promotion can be possible and some organisations try to recruit internally but this still requires a position to become available.

Smaller community organisations commonly have no ability to promote staff especially in sole worker positions.

Professional Development

In an industry with changing standards commitment to professional development would appear to be important and necessary to organisations.

Most organisations that were interviewed allocated around \$300 to \$500 per employee with two organisations giving up to \$800 to \$1000 towards the training of their staff at higher levels. Often this amount cannot cover the full cost of the course to the employee especially courses at post-graduate level or courses in management. Courses can also be a significant cost to employees.

In relation to retention of staff, study leave was mentioned twice as a reason for staff resigning and so was career development.

Although not all of these organisations resource training in the same way and it is often affected by funding especially at higher levels such as service coordinators/manager roles where courses are more expensive. Another cost for some organisations is replacing the staff member who is away on training.

To resource external professional development, organisations may grant study leave and set training budgets. Some training budgets grant an amount per worker to go toward study fees annually while others examine each course on its merit and decide how much funding will be allocated each course. The amount in a training budget varies quite significantly within community organisations. One organisation stated they reserve about 1.5% of their funding to staff training with that being enough and

another stating they put 3.5% of funding toward staff training and would rather it was larger.

Larger community organisations often find it more cost effective to hire trainers to come into the organisation to run a course for more than one employee internally. This can allow for tailoring the training to the organisation.

One organisation interviewed has compulsory training.

“(As) a learning organisation we have compulsory training and I totally agree with that because ... leadership needs to be shown...”

Under the SACS Award there is currently no obligation for study leave, training budgets or other provisions for staff professional development. This could also be a factor in staff leaving for the government sector where provisions, such as study leave, are provided within the Award and therefore compulsory. If it was included in the Award, funding bodies would have to provide funding for it and this would assist in retaining staff.

Staff Supervision

The support staff are given in relation to defusing, supervision and debriefing can be an important factor in people handling their position and staying in the community organisation and/or sector. It is also an important Occupational Health and Safety issue.

Western Sydney Community Forum are writing a report on supervision currently, so this issue was only discussed briefly in the interviews but it needs to be talked about here briefly in relation to recruitment and retention of staff.

In the survey stress was mentioned four times as a reason for leaving. This may have been considerably more if the survey had asked directly about why staff leave.

In interviews Coordinators/Managers were asked about supervision and found that managers had little time to extend to supervising staff such as providing support and conducting debriefing sessions and performance appraisals. Managers reported frustration and burnout due to the limited hours available to conduct all the managerial tasks.

"That's (supervision) an aspect of my work I never get time to do. That's what I find frustrating and that's what causes burnout of managers because I want to be a good manager of my human resources and I find I don't have the time it's all I can find time for once a year to do a performance appraisal. I don't have adequate time to meet with staff to debrief, to counsel or support that I would like to have because I am only .5 of a manager. Only half of my role was a manager with 23 staff ..."

"... what happens of course is that I work as many of us (coordinators/managers) do a heap of hours over what we are required to work to meet those needs..."

Another Coordinator/Manager also said there were issues with staff getting enough supervision that may affect their morale, health and well-being.

"Permanent workers get external supervision, casual workers I supervise, ... I do not believe any worker receives the level of supervision they need. As a worker it can hurt our psyche affecting our mental health and emotional health, workers get very tired..."

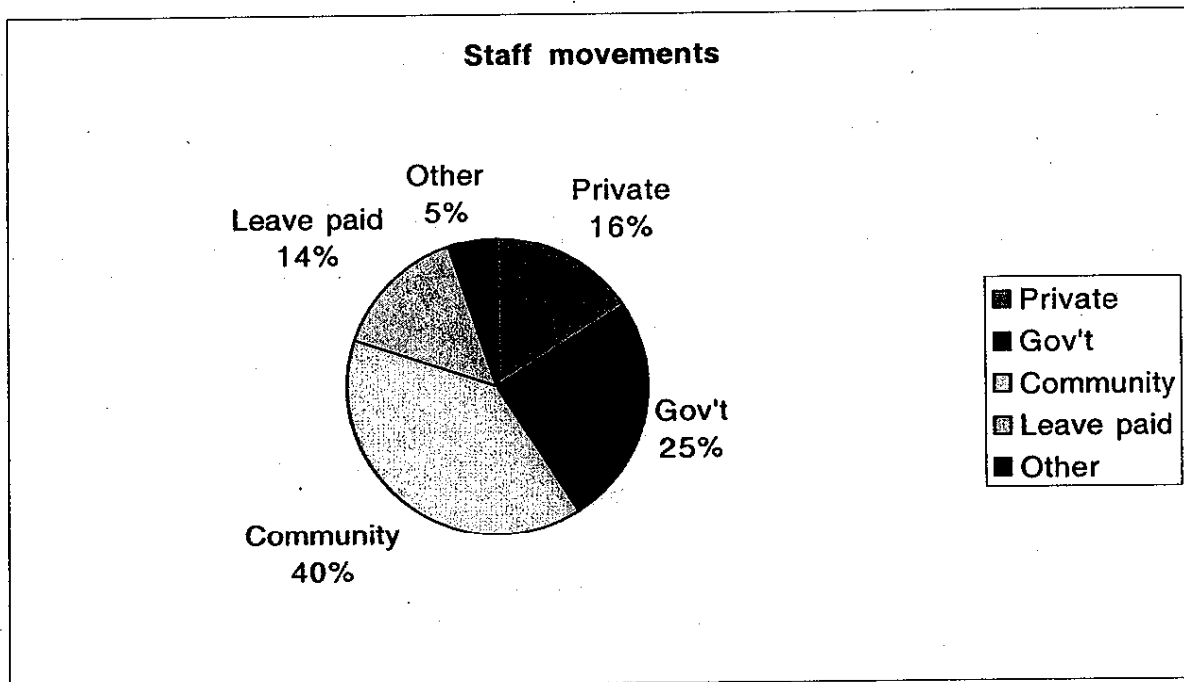
Some larger organisations reported to have very good supervision that assists them to retain staff.

Destinations people go to when they leave Community Organisations in Western Sydney

In understanding the issues and difficulties in retaining staff in community organisations in Western Sydney it is important to understand where they are going when they leave their existing workplace. With so many community organisations losing staff to different sectors and/or locations it could be considered a mass exodus, and a loss of valuable skills.

According to the survey 40% staff go to other community sectors, followed by the government and private sectors. Others took paid leave, study leave or retire. Many organisations did not know where their staff moved after resignation. Over 44% community organisations reported to have lost more than one member of staff to more than one sector and/or areas they have indicated.

Graph 2 Community staff sector movements



On reflection, 60% of community organisations lost one or more members to a field outside the community sector. This is a significant loss to the community sector.

Some staff reportedly leave for bigger community organisations and/or community organisations that can afford to pay their staff more. The award structure may also be a factor here where people change organisations to move up the Award grade and go into another position that may not exist at the current organisation.

19 community organisations indicated they had lost one or more staff to the government sector. This could be due to better pay and conditions that are usually offered by government and more clearly structured career paths.

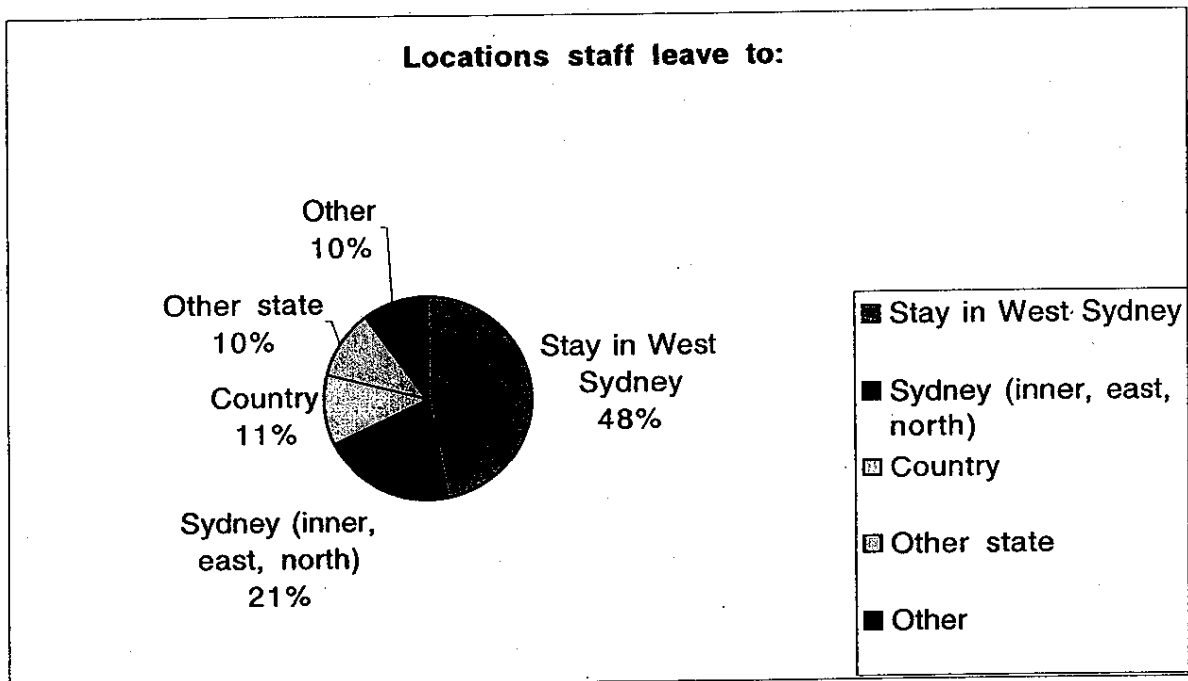
“People go to government jobs because they know they can work the way up the ladder and they can get the training that they need to do that, ... especially young people because that’s what you want you don’t want to be in the same job for the next ten years and the nature of work is that you won’t, especially in community service you won’t be in the same job more than twelve months or two years, so if people come into community services & health as an employee and their needs aren’t met in terms of development. Obviously they’re not going to stay in the industry (not just the organisation) but they won’t stay in the industry or they will move into government. That’s what’s happening now”

12 community organisations indicated that they had lost one or more staff to private practice/business sector. These were usually within roles that traditionally work in private practice such as health, legal, finance and other para – medical and alternative health professions. This also could be due to better pay and conditions offered by the private sector.

11 staff members resigned from the paid workforce entirely. The reasons were mostly retirement or to care for children, but some were indicated as also going back to study. This is common within most sectors.

The issue of retention of staff in community sector is vitally important and it is indicated from surveys and other evidence that many people are leaving.

Graph 3 Subsequent locations of Western Sydney community organisation staff after resignation



Many community organisations reported to have lost one or more staff to several locations. 48% of community organisations had lost one or more staff members that stayed in Western Sydney but 52% left Western Sydney altogether.

21% of community organisations lost one/or more staff to the inner suburbs, eastern suburbs or northern suburbs of Sydney. In Sydney there has historically been a divide between the northern and western suburbs.

11% of community organisations had lost one/or more staff to country areas and 10% lost one/or more staff to another state.

Ten community organisations lost staff to move overseas. One Coordinator interviewed, for example, was going to Ireland to work in Child protection and indicated it was an opportunity to learn something new and the conditions were very attractive.

A reason to leave Western Sydney may be a lifestyle choice. In two interviews and several surveys it was reported that the location of their organisation discouraged potential applicants applying for positions. One organisation readvertised their positions leaving out the suburb "Auburn" to get a better response. Going to country areas may be a way of gaining a promotion, increasing pay and furthering career prospects. Some other states have awards with better pay and conditions for people working in community organisations.

Why do people work in Community Organisations in Western Sydney?

In the interviews there was a variety of responses to the following questions:

1. Why do you work in a community organisation in western Sydney?
2. What do you like about working in a community organisation in western Sydney?
3. What do you think would attract more people to community services?

A variety of reasons came up in response to these questions.

A main reason for the appeal of working in the community sector was the reward of working to benefit people in the community and feeling like they had "made a difference in society" and the general nature of the work. Community work provides the chance of applying their commitment to social justice and personal development.

"I feel I have made a difference here and it's hard as a community worker to know you've made a difference, So I think after five years I see the difference I, as a person, have made in this community.... I see it everyday when women say they are getting on with their lives and that makes me really happy, I've strengthened my political voice and I am much clearer about my personal voice and who I am in the context of social change, that's fantastic..."

Working in community organisations enables flexibility and autonomy of carrying out tasks and being creative. One stated that, in comparison to government sectors, community organisations were free from the bureaucratic process.

"For me, (what I like about working in community services) it is about the fact I can grow and develop as a person, so a very big emphasis on personal development and the autonomy. I like to have a fair amount of control over my work environment, where you know you can make a difference..."

The majority of staff in the community organisations interviewed lived in Western Sydney, and many within the same or neighbouring Local Government areas, and during interviews this was raised as one reason people work in community organisations in Western Sydney.

A coordinator talked about the opportunity to learn as the appeal of working in community organisations. The interviewee said that community organisations allows for the chance of taking on various tasks and responsibilities not initially employed for enabling staff to gain valuable and varied knowledge and skills.

"I like the fact that some areas overlap, for example, if you are doing community development sometimes you have to address particular welfare issues even though that might not be your actual role or responsibility because it means then that you have to gain knowledge in a whole range of areas..."

Another interviewee stated that she was working in a community organisation as a learning experience, and that she was required to become a "jack of all trades, and master of none." in the position.

One interviewee stated that where she worked was more a lifestyle choice, she liked her work, there was a family atmosphere and that she lived in a place she wanted to.

An interviewee argued that the way to attract people to the community sector is to increase the pay to match staffs' level of qualification and years of valuable service.

Another interviewee said if more money could not be offered it was important to offer better conditions.

Morale

Morale is an important issue for retaining and recruiting staff in community organisations. It can be influenced by numerous factors including the nature of the work, organisational change, conflict, grievance procedures, pay, individual differences, teamwork, the environment and supervision, to mention only a few of the areas. This study only looked at morale briefly in the interviews.

As in the Plumber research (Wagner et al 1999) positive morale was strongly linked to the intrinsic nature of the work. Most community organisations interviewed were happy with the morale in their organisations. Some of the interviewees stated they found their workplace and/or work inspiring, and 3 said that it was the best workplace/community organisation they had worked for.

Two community organisations talked about the negative effect change can have on workplace morale. Organisations, where the staff had remained in the positions for years, struggled the most with new management attempting changes.

One organisation commented on how change can create a better workplace morale through learning managerial skills and teambuilding to improve things from the top down.

"Morale? It 's getting better I've been on a bit of a rampage at the moment that's what they're calling it... on teambuilding, and managerial skills. My belief is people learn from example and if managers aren't doing their job properly the people underneath them aren't going to cope properly. As we speak I am doing courses with all the management on managerial skills and personal skills. I am hoping that it goes down through the team ...there are power struggles and people have been saying 'that's mine and that's mine and that's not yours". I am gradually getting it through to them that it's a whole team thing, and people do have to be accountable which is one

of the things you have to be able to do as a manager. If they can't take that on board, they shouldn't be managers. It's getting better, we're trying really hard to build a team atmosphere right down to the support workers."

The importance of good communication and commitment to working things out can make important difference to the morale of a community organisation. This will be affected by personal interest in the job and belief in the organisation's objectives, philosophy and methods.

Another issue affecting morale was grievance procedures and/or lack of their implementation. Interviews showed organisations that everyone knew grievance procedures and used them often. Conflicts were more easily worked out & contributed to higher staff morale. Communications was also another factor that lead to higher workplace morale and ability to resolve conflicts.

In one interview it was raised that the procedures of recruiting staff was an issue for workplace morale, due to staff having to take on tasks that were not generally part of their duties.

" To do this work you have to be committed to what you do therefore people are very passionate about their work so if there's a problem it is going to be personal."

Sometimes working with the different personalities can affect morale. This may be more difficult to manage, especially in smaller organisations but this is inevitable in any working environment. One community organisation talked about how hard the management committee had worked in making changes in staff as smooth as possible for morale, and it is important to note that high turnover in staff can vary staff morale significantly.

Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers make a significant and vital contribution to many Community Organisations.

In the survey 71% of organisations specified they use volunteers in some capacity and most community organisations have voluntary management committees. The number of volunteers reported in the survey by any one organisation ranged from 2 to 268. The types of volunteers employed varied from general administration, project support, management committees, drivers, counsellors, gardeners and other miscellaneous jobs such as providers of 'Meals on Wheels'. Some Community Organisations are run exclusively by volunteers.

Of these community organisations 34% reported to have difficulties recruiting volunteers. The main reasons for the difficulty reported was the lack of staff, time and resources to supervise volunteers and provide training. Other factors included the legalities and safety of volunteers. Some reported that volunteers lacked the skills to provide the services they required.

"As most coordinators will tell you they can only do so much in the time available, and work has to be put into establishing volunteer participation mandatory and core, criminal checks, training your volunteers and supporting them."

"...more and more we have to ask volunteers to do things that really paid staff should be doing. We don't have the resources to meet the ever increasing need ...for instance, at this neighbourhood centre we run a big emergency food supply. The food is all cooked, and prepared by volunteers staff.... I think that's inappropriate. I think that a government should provide adequate living for it's citizens when they've vulnerable."

The use of volunteers is essential to community organisations due to the funding problems they report. It also provides a chance for community organisations to provide many and varied services that would otherwise not be available. It also

provides a chance for people to obtain personal fulfilment for contributing to the community and is a good training ground for students to gain experience and knowledge. The problem some community organisations have in attracting volunteers can affect the output of service to the community. One organisation interviewed was requesting volunteers urgently due to the ageing of many people currently working there to contribute to their community.

Recommendations

Further Research

This project was a five-week Linkwest Cooperative Programs Research Project. Unfortunately the limitations of this study was, most significantly, time since it was only funded for five weeks that affected the ability to do more in-depth research.

It is recommended that further research be conducted by The School of Applied Social and Human Sciences (SASHS) of Western Sydney University (UWS) in partnership with Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF). Issues that require further research are staff recruitment, morale and retention in community organisations of Western Sydney.

One possibility is for the university to hire a student through Linkwest for a semester project that can benefit the student by gaining them credit for their course and experience while being a cost effective way to get more in-depth research done. Student Projects could become annual or biannual or done each semester. Further research could be conducted in the following:

- Interviewing management committee members on recruitment processes, staff morale and retention of staff in western Sydney community organisations.
- Examining the implementation or lack of implementation of occupational health and safety, best practice models, techniques, other strategies and

processes relating to retirement, morale, and retention of staff within community organisations in Western Sydney.

- Interviewing people who have left community organisations to understand why people are leaving, where they go once they leave and what needs to change for them to return to community organizations in Western Sydney
- Comparing the recruiting, morale, and retention of staff in community organisations with a religious affiliation or dominant ideology to those who don't have that type of base or core.
- Comparing larger welfare/community organisations in Western Sydney to those who are smaller in size in how they recruit staff, staff morale and retention rates.
- Examining different positions, for example, managers and coordinators or youth workers to find out about difficulties that are particular to the job position and level.
- Statistical information on where staff go when they resign from community organisations.
- A narrower project/s that looks at one particular service within the sector for example Home and Community Care (HACC) or Neighbourhood Centres to find out the problems that relate specifically to each service in recruiting, morale and retention rates.

More research is going to be conducted in the future by Western Sydney Community Forum.

Flexibility of Hours

During interviews flexibility of hours was raised as one of the common reasons people entered community services.

In many organisations the use of programs and policies such as good management of time in lieu, part time work, full time work, shift work, job sharing, and job splitting have lead to flexibility of hours.

Flexibility of hours allows the sector to employ people such as students, and those with parenting responsibilities that otherwise might not be able or willing to currently work in the sector or at all. It also allows for the opportunity to be employed and use their skills in a community organisation.

Creation of Career Pathways and Increased Possibility for Advancement

A career path is difficult to forge in the community services field due to the funding of projects and the award. This may be a factor in people not entering or leaving the sector

The grade of the position the project is funded for rarely changes. There are only a few yearly increment rates to advance people and consequently employees get stuck on the same rates of pay and task level, regardless of further qualifications or the many years of experience. This may cause an employee to change positions or organisations as regularly as they can qualify for the higher job. This increases the low retention rate within the field. It is also not possible to promote a worker over their award even for outstanding performance, unless the position and funding can be changed.

As a sector, lobbying for change within the recent SACS Award for promotion, based on performance, would assist career advancement in community services. This could not work if major funding bodies were not supportive. Within larger community organisations this problem may be overcome by promoting staff within the organisation to a higher position, if one becomes available, but this is not generally possible for small organisations with sole project workers. There are limits to what small community organisations alone can do in this situation.

Job Security and Long Term Funding

In this sector many projects are funded for one or three years, which makes advertised positions very difficult to fill as projects are finite and there may be little or no chance

of getting more funding. This often means a person can be very good at their job and yet later, end up unemployed. In a market that is competing for employees and vastly understaffed with many positions being vacant for more than six months most people choose to enter work that is more long term and provides them with job security. Many positions may continue to go unfilled due to the short-term nature of the funding of a project. Employees deserve the security of ongoing funding, and the community often come to expect a particular service to fill their needs and it can be very damaging for all involved to lose their funding.

In some services it may be useful to assess the value in taking on a project that is only funded for the short term or to add hours to existing part-time staff to fill a short-term project rather than taking on an employee solely for that role, as some positions may be unfilled for years.

Commitment to Professional Development

In an industry with changing standards, commitment to professional development would appear to be important to organisations. Although not all of these organisations resource it in the same way and it is often affected by funding, especially at higher levels such as service coordinator/manager roles where courses are more expensive. Another cost is usually accrued in replacing the staff member for that time.

A way to resource external professional development may be to grant study leave and provide training budgets. Some training budgets grant an amount per worker to go toward study fees annually while others examine each course on its merit and decide how much funding will be allocated to each course. Often this amount cannot cover the full cost of the course to the employee. Larger community organisations often find it more cost effective to hire trainers to come into the organisation to run a course for more than one employee internally.

Under the SACS Award there is currently no obligation for study leave, training budgets or other provisions for staff's professional development, and this could also

be a factor in staff leaving for the government sector where provisions such as study leave are provided.

Implementing policies to support staff in their professional development is recommended to recruit and retain staff, and can take many forms through external or internal training. This would assist in attracting staff who are committed to developing their career.

Enterprise Agreements (EBA) or Australian Workplace Agreements (AWA)

An effective approach to improve working conditions, retention and recruitment rates would be to offer conditions better than the award by implementing an Enterprise Agreement or an Australian Workplace Agreement. An example of conditions that could be offered is better leave conditions or pay calculated on a 35-hour week rather than the standard 38 or 40-hour week. Another possibility is to package the salary using salary sacrifice to reduce taxation and save the employee money.

“An enterprise agreement sets out the minimum conditions of employment for employees engaged in particular types of work in the same way as an award. However, unlike most awards, enterprise agreements are specific to a particular enterprise or project. Enterprise agreements are negotiated voluntarily between an employer and either the employees concerned or a union on the behalf of those employees (the parties). ...Every enterprise agreement must be in writing and signed by or on the behalf of the parties. The parties to the agreement must be named and the agreement must state who will be covered by the agreement ” (NSW Department of Industrial Relations Website).

An Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA) is more common in the sector and is slightly different to an Enterprise Agreement. This can be entered into between an employer and individual employee or group of employees but must be signed by each individual and each new employee under the Federal Workplace relations Act (1996).

An AWA will be lodged with the Employment Advocates who will make sure it passes the “no disadvantage test” and if anything arises that can not be resolved it will be referred to the Industrial Relations Commission otherwise it will be made legal. In an AWA an employer can offer different conditions and pay to different employees providing that no employee is treated unfairly or unreasonably in doing so and this is the major difference in the Enterprise agreement and the Australian Workers Agreement. Cited Australian Services Union (NSW & ACT Branch) Website.

Paid Parental Leave

This was one of the most common requests during this study and while it is important to all people, especially women in every sector, it could be considered even more important in a sector dominated by women who are still, more commonly, the primary carer of children.

During interviews it was found that staff had left the sector due, at least in part, to not having paid parental leave. It was especially an issue to them when starting a family.

While a parent can use personal/carers leave if the child is unwell, no provisions are stated for using personal/carer’s leave for a healthy child who still requires care. Under the SACS Award personal/caring entitles them to take their sick leave, annual leave and time in lieu as well as time without pay.

If this is important concern for staff individual organisations can offer this as an incentive to staff through an Enterprise Agreements or Australian Workplace Agreements as one organisation interviewed already does. Although organisations that want to do this may have problems with funding, because no funding from governmental departments is given to do this. Financial resources for this could come from internal sources via charging each project a fee annually to be placed in an account for such entitlements.

The sector also must lobby strongly if it wants to gain the right to paid parental leave and for that to be covered by governmental funding bodies.

Defusing, Supervision and Debriefing for all Staff

Defusing, supervision and debriefing can be overlooked due to heavy workloads, but is really vital to staff morale, avoiding staff burnout (which is common in the sector) and retention of staff in the community services sector.

For further information refer to Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) report on Supervision.

Outlined and Implemented Grievance Policy

This can assist organisations in dealing with conflicts in the workplace that may otherwise lead to low morale or staff resignation. It is important for all workers to have complete understanding of how the grievance policy can be implemented when they have issues to address and that it is implemented for disputes and conflicts.

It is important for all organisations to have an appropriate grievance policy of which all staff have a copy or access to it. The reason being that if an organisation has not had an important conflict to resolve, in many years, they may not be prepared to deal with one when it arises. This may lead to improper handling of a situation and/or resignations that could have been avoided.

Overtime Rates and Time in Lieu

Overtime rates need to be optional because some organisations may be happy with time in lieu policies that they use at present as one interviewee made clear. It seems to work best if employees take time in lieu in small amounts on a regular basis.

Another option is to have overtime rates only for direct client contact. This would be of considerable benefit when people are called in for issues that need immediate resolution during out of business hours, for example, on weekends or days they normally do not work. Each organisation should be able to make up their own policies to adequately compensate for all the work put in by staff.

For this to be implemented it would be imperative for organisations to examine the efficiency of their time management practices, to address all the issues that may arise through time management and have them clearly defined. This requires clarifying what tasks would gain time in lieu and what tasks would pay overtime rates.

The SACS Award does state that overtime shall be paid at the request of the employee that has not taken time in lieu within four weeks of accrual. The employer and employee must decide whether to take accrued time as overtime payment. This rarely happens as usually time off is paid at ordinary time rates of pay.

Currently many community organisations want to offer paid overtime rates stated in the award but there is no funding available for them to do so. As a sector it is an important issue that should be lobbied to change.

Family Environment

Many community organisations foster the family environment in different ways. Some organisations have policies or practices of children coming in after school while their parents' work or use of childcare facilities for clients that children of employees also use. This can be a great benefit to parents who are able to save on childcare and spend time with their children while still working. Often this can be appropriate and productive for staff because other families are using the facilities anyway and it doesn't interfere with working. This can be a major incentive in retaining staff.

Higher rates of Pay

Everyone interviewed and almost everyone responding to the survey specified that higher rates of pay would assist in attracting paid staff to the sector. While this may be true for any profession people working in this field are usually not paid according to their level of responsibility for the duties they perform, and the years they spent working and/or studying to reach that level. This is an issue that is very complex involving funding bodies and the union, but where possible it would help recruitment and retention of staff to offer even a small amount over the award to attract and retain staff.

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Wagner, R; Spence, N; van Reyk, P; Scott, E (1999). I always say I'm a plumber: Significant factors in job satisfaction, staff morale and retention in children's welfare agencies. UWS Nepean/ACWA PO box 10 Kingswood, NSW, 2742

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Recruitment Difficulties for Community Organisations in Western Sydney

- 1) Name of your community organisation and suburb:

- 2) Approximately how many paid workers does your community organisation have? _____
- 3) What gender are your employees? _____ Females _____ Males
- 4) Does your community organisation have a high turnover of staff? (please circle). Yes No
Please explain? _____

- 5) When staff resign from your organisation what locations and type of service do they go to? (please circle and indicate numbers if more then one)
Private Sector (Business)
Government
Another community organisation
Leave paid workforce
Other (please specify) _____
- 6) When staff resign from your organisation what location do they go to?
(please circle and indicate numbers if more then one)
Stay in western Sydney
Sydney (inner city, eastern suburbs or north shore)
Country Areas
Other State/Territory
Other _____
- 7) What Industrial Awards do you employ staff under? (please circle)
SACS (Social and Community Services Employees Award)
CETSS (Community Employment and Training Support Services Award)
Clerical
Other _____
- 8) Do you think further improvements to pay and conditions of SACS award would assist in attracting and retaining staff? (please circle) Yes No
If yes please identify which areas are priorities (please circle)
Pay Rates
Conditions please specify which conditions? _____

- 9) Are most of your staff members of a union? (please circle) Yes No Don't Know
- 10) Does your organisation have an enterprise agreement? _____
- 11) Do you have difficulties recruiting paid staff? (please circle) Yes No
If yes please give details _____

12) How do you advertise for paid staff? _____

13) Have you tried to recruit paid employees in 2001? (please circle) Yes No

Position Title			
Briefly list Qualifications needed for position listed Above			
Did you find this person? (please Circle) How long did it take to find the person or how long have you been searching?	Yes or No	Yes or No	Yes or No
Where does the funding for this project come from? (E.g. DOCS)			

14) What strategies were implemented to address any problems?

16) Was your service still able to open during this time? (please circle) Yes No
If No which position? _____

17) Was it still able to provide all services to your clients? (please circle) Yes No
If No what services could not be offered? _____

18) Does your community organisation have funding problems? (please circle) Yes No

19) Does funding effect recruiting paid staff? (please circle) Yes No

20) Does your community organisation use volunteers? (please circle) Yes No
If yes how many and in what capacity? (e.g.: administration/project support etc.)

21) Does your community organisation have difficulties recruiting volunteers? (please circle)
Yes No
If yes please give details?

Are you interested in taking part in a 30-minute telephone interview? (please circle) Yes No
If yes please specify contact name and telephone number

***PLEASE FAX THIS SURVEY BACK TO WESTERN SYDNEY COMMUNITY FORUM BY 5PM 25
JANUARY 2002 AND THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING.***

If you need any more paper please attach another sheet and write the number of the corresponding number next to the answer.