



Public Service Association of SA Inc

Community and Public Sector Union • SA Branch • SPSF Group

Mr Guy Dickson
Secretary
Select Committee on Families SA
Parliament House, North Terrace,
Adelaide SA 5000

26 March 2009

Dear Mr Dickson,

Enclosed please find the Public Service Association's submission to the Select Committee on Families SA.

Additional information is able to be provided if requested.

Contact officer in this matter is PSA Chief Industrial Officer Peter Christopher who can be contacted on 8205 3200 or at pgc@cpsu.asn.au

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nev Kitchen', written over a horizontal line.

NEV KITCHIN
ACTING GENERAL SECRETARY

Public Service Association of South Australia



Submission to the Select Committee on Families SA

March 2009

The Public Service Association is South Australia's largest public sector union. The PSA membership includes a high percentage of the staff across Families SA including Professionals, including Social Workers and psychologists, Youth workers, Administrative Officers and others. These people are employed in Families SA District Centres, Residential and Secure Care facilities and other areas.

The PSA is thus in a unique position to provide information and an informed perspective on the operation of Families and this report has been prepared to reflect that.

The Government, through successive Ministers, has made it plain that it believes that the jobs of those at the front-line in Families are among the most difficult in our society. Increasingly the community is being advised that Families SA is only able to deal with around 56% of the demands that are placed on it by South Australians in need of help. This is in a time when those demands are increasing significantly year by year. An example of this is that, as at 30 June 2008 there were 1942 children and young people under the guardianship or custody of the Minister (1). Since 2004 there has been a steady growth of an average of 10% per annum in the number of children and young people under the custody or guardianship of the Minister in South Australia (1).

Following many other reports and investigations, the 2002 Review into Child Protection in South Australia (the Layton review) and the recent Children in State Care and Children on APY Lands Commissions of Inquiry (the Mullighan reports) have closely investigated the state of the 'system' in this state and provided hundreds of recommendations aimed at improvement. State Government funding has increased, most recently in the 2008 State Budget when an additional \$190 million (over 4 years) was allocated. That funding, a tiny amount in comparison to the overall Budget, is to go almost totally to the non-government sector. At the same time, Families SA has been required to cut its budget by 4% as part of public service cutbacks. In addition, the PSA is advised that departmental budgets were cut by a further 1.5% to help fund an Enterprise Agreement pay rise in October 2008.

At present, the system grades notifications to the Child Abuse Report Line into three Tiers, Tier 1 - in immediate danger, Tier 2 - at serious risk and Tier 3 - in need. For some time, only the most pressing reports have been allocated to individual Families staff - the Tier 1 reports involving physical abuse or Tier 2 where there is serious risk of such abuse occurring. Inevitably, it is the Tier 3 matters that drop off the 'to do' list. Yet, as the Layton report, among others, explicitly recommended, for a properly effective child welfare system to operate the first signs of something going awry need to be heeded and responded to. One of the greatest frustrations for front-line Families workers is the knowledge that, were there more time (and more workers in the field) many of the matters raised in 'low-level' reports to the Child Abuse Report Line could be successfully dealt with and not left to grow into Tier 2 or 1 notifications which all have their own social and economic cost. The 'Our Best Investment' title of Robyn Layton's report really says it. If we are serious about dealing with this blight on our society then there must be leadership, and above all there must be a recognition that a major investment now will provide savings in the future, not only in avoiding more tragedies but financially.

PSA members report that in general only half of Tier 2 reports are being allocated and dealt with, whilst many District Offices mark Tier 3 reports 'Closed No Action' as a matter of course. Many of these cases, often between a third and a half, have been involved in many previous occurrences.

There is a disconnect between the above factors.

The system is failing and there needs to be proper investment in a functional child welfare system.

There is a lack of leadership in Families SA. A recurring question is "What is the work that is not to be done given that Families SA is chronically under-resourced." Aside from the fact that Departmental requirements are not being met, increasingly Guardian of the Minister children (the most vulnerable in many ways) are not receiving proper support as required by the law. It is believed that in 2006-07 only 35% of children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister had the statutory annual review of their circumstances.

Reports continue to appear in the media of children suffering from neglect and violence and it is clearly only a matter of time before further deaths occur. The current system is inadequate and is failing the community. Despite some attempts by the Department to recruit staff, particularly professionals, vacancies remain in 'problem' offices and in the regions. The Department has become adept at employing the claim that vacant positions are being filled - yet the facts are that even if all positions were filled there is simply not enough resources to meet the demands of families in need.

Despite recognition in the Layton and Mullighan reports of the need for proper recognition of staff and effective recruitment and retention strategies, little effectively has been done. Social Workers in Families SA commence at Level 1 while staff carrying out similar responsibilities in other government agencies and in the private sector are more often employed at Level 2 or the equivalent. This is the reward for carrying out one of the more testing roles in society. In Mental Health and in the SA Dental Service professional staff were individually assessed and, as a result, many were reclassified. Families has rejected this approach (as always on the basis of cost) opting instead for a 'progression' approach limited to those who have been employed by the Department for seven or more years subject to meeting detailed criteria. Few have used this process, fewer still have been successful.

A minimum departmental standard of visiting each Guardianship child at least once a month was established many years ago. This remains the standard that is aimed for but resources mean that this is now more often than not unachievable and, of those children allocated a case worker (some are not), many are visited less frequently, maybe only during school holiday periods and not even that in some instances. Unallocated children receive limited contact primarily from whoever is available rather than the legally required consistent professional approach that an allocated Social Worker can provide.

The Government often highlights a significant increase in funding (\$69.7million in the 2007-08 State Budget) for child protection and out of home care. What isn't pointed out is that \$48.7million of that amount went to meet budget shortfalls and staffing to meet

increased demand. (2). So, while it is recognised, particularly in the Guardian's report, that there was massive under-resourcing in 2006-07 resulting in inadequate support, what was provided in the 2007-08 budget meant that there was little if any improvement.

It is difficult to get specific details on the way that notifications to Families SA are being dealt with or not dealt with. Clear statistics are not readily available and staff run great risks if they provide information to third parties. However, it is recognised that FSA is currently responding to about 56% of the total notifications made per year. PSA believes that, as a consequence of this, a high number of reports are being closed with no action or investigation which include Tier 2's and Tier 3's and cover the whole abuse spectrum. This includes cases being closed without assessment or investigation which include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Some of these cases being closed have long, horrific histories of abuse which have never been responded to. This contributes to the high stress and burnout that afflicts many Families SA staff.

The Layton report Recommendation 47 states that all Tier 3 cases (the 'least serious' ones) are to be properly investigated and assessed. The reality is that, in most District Centres, Tier 3 reports are not allocated to a staff member and receive no service because of a lack of resources.

Work overload and the lack of recognition of staff while responsibilities increased led, in 2008, to a number of instances of industrial action by PSA members in Families SA. Firstly in the Modbury District Centre, then the Crisis Response unit and, in late 2008 across the agency, Families SA workers took industrial action out of frustration at the lack of action on these important issues.

A number of PSA Briefs are attached to provide details of the issues.

The actions have been suspended pending further discussions between the Department and the PSA. Families staff are despondent and dispirited. They have not been receiving proper support from the highest levels of the Department.

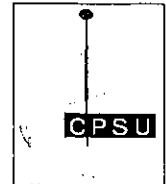
In recent months we have seen a new Minister and Chief Executive of the Department for Families & Communities and a new Executive Director of Families SA. It is still early days but it is to be hoped that this new high-level team will move on from the inadequacies of recent times and start to deal with these issues in a more substantive way and that Government will properly resource the Agency to allow this to occur.

References: (1) Guardian for Children and Young People 2007-08 Annual report.
(2)(Guardian for Children and Young People 2006-07 Annual Report p4)



**PSA/CPSU
BRIEF**

**INFORMATION
UPDATE**



**TO ALL PSA WORKSITE REPRESENTATIVES AND
PSA MEMBERS IN FAMILIES SA**

CHILD PROTECTION

PSA Worksite Representatives met recently to discuss the significant increase in workload for those members with responsibilities for child protection. This was discussed in light of the Government's proposed changes to the Workers' Compensation legislation which is likely to reduce income entitlements for injured workers.

The following resolutions were passed by the Worksite Representatives:-

1. "the Layton and Mullighan Inquiries have identified the need for additional resources and programmes to protect children and families,
2. concern was expressed that insufficient resources have been provided by government to allow for this to occur,
3. that the additional funds in the 2008/2009 Budget will not significantly increase staff in 2008/2009,
4. that there is an acknowledged increase in workload attached to the increase in Child Protection notifications which places a dangerously high workload increase on staff."

Therefore, Families SA/PSA Worksite Representatives formally advise the department that a workload campaign will commence and this group will reconvene following the departmental management meeting arranged for June 23 to receive a report and determine what actions will need to occur.

"This meeting of DFC FSA Worksite Representatives endorse a workcover campaign to fight for members rights including refusing to work in unsafe situations and pursuing additional payments following injury at work through enterprise bargaining where workcover benefits are restricted."

The PSA seeks to work with you to ensure that resources and processes are put in place urgently to ensure statutory requirements are met without placing PSA members at risk.

If you have any questions or concerns in relation to this information please contact PSA Industrial Officer Vanessa Ravenhill on vr@cpsu.asn.au

PSA WORKING FOR MEMBERS IN FAMILIES SA

25/03/2009

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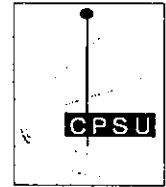
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PSA/CPSU BRIEF

INFORMATION UPDATE



TO ALL PSA MEMBERS IN DEPARTMENT FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

FAMILIES SA INDUSTRIAL ACTION UPDATE

Public Service Association (PSA) Acting Assistant Chief Industrial Officer Ian Peak and Industrial Officers Vanessa Ravenhill and Ken Smith met with Steve Ramsey, Marj Ellis, David Shone and Jackie Campbell from Department for Families and Communities (DFC) on Tuesday 4 November 2008 to discuss a range of matters, previously raised with the Minister and Chief Executive for Families and Communities on 27 October and 29 October. It was agreed at those meetings that these matters would be dealt with separately and therefore the purpose of the meeting was for the provision of information only.

Targeted Classification Assessment Process

PSA was advised that the department is committed to this process in the updated format and prepared to accept applications for eligible staff (PO1 staff who have been in the top increment for 12 months).

Further details are provided in a separate PSA Information Update, titled "Targeted Classification Assessment Process (TCAP) Report".

Growth Formula from State Budget 2008 - 2009

PSA was advised that a growth formula linked to an increase in Child Protection notifications and additional children in care has resulted in approval for 13-15 new positions for direct line staff in District Centres. The details are currently being negotiated with District Centre Managers. There is a current selection process occurring for PO1 Social Worker positions. PSA expressed concern that members employed on temporary contracts were often expected to lodge multiple applications in an effort to obtain an ongoing position. Any member who believes they may have been affected by this practice are urged to contact PSA with details.

Vacancies

PSA was advised that there are currently 28 vacant PO1 positions in the agency, where the substantive occupant is absent on leave and that there are no staff on temporary contract filling these positions. PSA raised a concern that the agency was not funded to backfill employees on long service leave and the subsequent impact these absences must have on service delivery. In addition to these temporary vacancies, there are an additional 30 positions vacant (5 Aboriginal Family Practitioners, 13 PO1 Social Workers and 12 PO2 Senior Social Workers (including 6 APY lands positions)). PSA was assured that every effort is being made to fill these vacancies. Families SA Executive have also sought approval for an increase in the staffing ceiling (within budget) and PSA will be advised once this is approved.

Members Using Own Money for Expenses

PSA was advised that staff are not expected to use their own money and the policy regarding expenditure on behalf of Families SA clients will be reissued to Business Managers. Any member who believes they may have been affected by this practice are invited to contact the PSA.

Provision of Overtime Payments

PSA was advised that the policy regarding claims for overtime will be reissued to all Business Managers. PSA raised concerns that many members are not aware that overtime payment instead of Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) is an entitlement.

PSA is also concerned over reports that some members had lost TOIL. Any members affected by this are encouraged to contact PSA.

Resources

PSA have raised concerns that members lacked "the tools of the trade" when providing services to clients. A total of 12 vehicles will be released shortly with the following areas receiving additional resources: Gawler - 1, Elizabeth - 1, Murray Bridge - 3, Pt Lincoln - 1, Riverland - 1, Salisbury - 1, Whyalla - 1, Woodville - 2 and Adelaide - 1.

PSA raised concerns that the policy of providing a mobile phone per vehicle has placed members at risk if they have arranged contact with a client and no phone is available. PSA was advised that the safety of staff is of paramount importance and additional phones will be purchased where it is identified that there is a shortage.

Members are asked to contact the PSA with details. Additional computers will also be provided if needed.

Children Under the Guardianship of the Minister

PSA was advised that the draft document "Workload Measurement and Management System" and the review of the Differential Response process may help to address the resource problem. It is hoped that a review of legislation and the potential to devolve responsibility for children who have been in care with foster carers for a significant period of time may also alleviate some of the pressure.

Closure of Tier 1 Cases

PSA was very concerned that there had been reports of Tier 1 cases being closed. Departmental representatives refuted this claim and stated that all cases had had some form of follow up. It was stated that the issue of existing external programmes not getting referrals would be addressed by the Leadership Group on Friday 7 November.

A detailed report of this meeting will be provided to the Families SA Worksite Representatives meeting scheduled for Tuesday 11 November at 2pm. PSA reiterated that the purpose of the campaign was aimed solely at increasing the resources within Families SA to prevent children being left in potentially dangerous situations and to provide better supports to children who had been removed by the department for this reason.

Please direct any enquiries to your Worksite Representative or Industrial Officer Vanessa Ravenhill on vr@cpsu.asn.au

PSA WORKING FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

25/03/2009

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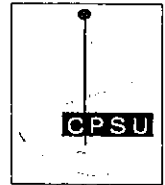
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**INFORMATION
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**TO ALL PSA WORKSITE REPRESENTATIVES AND PSA MEMBERS
FAMILIES SA**

PSA MEETS WITH MINISTER RANKINE CONCERNS FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

On Monday 27th October 2008 the PSA General Secretary Jan McMahon, Vice President Peter Hewish, a delegation of PSA Worksite Representatives and Senior Industrial Officers Vanessa Ravenhill and Simon Johnson met with Minister Rankine.

The PSA raised serious concerns regarding the lack of resources available in the Department to deal with children in immediate danger of abuse. PSA members expressed concern that children may die because of the Department's failure to intervene.

Families SA does not have enough employees to respond effectively to all calls to the Crisis Response Unit. Often callers hang for over 40 minutes before their call is answered. It is understood that up to 30% of calls drop out without ever being answered.

The level of resourcing is so inadequate that many calls reporting serious allegations of abuse are not dealt with at all. The Crisis Response Unit deals with the immediate call, a case file is established and the case is referred to the appropriate District Centre for action. District Centres are also significantly under-resourced that many of these disturbing cases are "closed no action"(CNA), because no staff are available to investigate the allegations. PSA stated that the current child protection system is dysfunctional.

The Minister discussed the additional funding the Government had committed in the 2008/2009 budget is to go to non-government organisations to assist with early intervention .

Whilst these funds are welcome, the PSA expressed their concern that children at risk are being seriously damaged right now. For many South Australian children early intervention is much too late. They need help now.

It also appears that approximately 150 children under the Guardianship of the Minister have no allocated worker and receive no contact on a regular basis from Families SA staff.

The PSA provided the Minister with real examples where children are placed at risk and there are no resources available to help or protect these children.

The Minister indicated that she would ensure that an urgent meeting was convened with the Chief Executive of Families and Communities to enable the PSA to reiterate their concerns and develop strategies to address them.

A further meeting of PSA Worksite Representatives will be held on Wednesday 29th October at 11.30. This meeting will receive a full briefing from the delegates who attended the meeting with the Minister.

For further information please contact Vanessa Ravenhill on vr@cpsu.asn.au

PSA WORKING FOR THE CHILDREN AT RISK

25/03/2009

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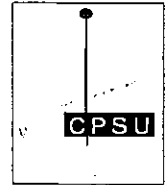
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**PSA/CPSU
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**INFORMATION
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TO ALL PSA MEMBERS IN FAMILIES SA

**INDUSTRIAL ACTION TO COMMENCE
IMMEDIATELY**

On Wednesday 29 October 2008, PSA General Secretary Jan McMahon, Vice President Peter Hewish, Families SA Worksite Representatives, and Industrial Staff met with the Chief Executive for the Department for Families and Communities Joslene Mazel.

The PSA raised serious concerns regarding the lack of resources available in the Department to deal with children in immediate danger of abuse. PSA members expressed concern that children may die because of the Department's failure to intervene.

The following Motion was passed unanimously:

"This meeting of Families SA PSA Worksite Representatives determines that until the Government provides adequate funding to address the current child protection crisis and the Minister and Chief Executive for Families and Communities lift the ban on filling of vacancies (2-3) in all District Centres as a result of 4% salary savings Government initiative, the following action will be taken, commencing immediately:

PSA members

- *will work to rule, including starting and finishing within normal business hours (8.45am – 5pm).*
- *will take a common lunch break, at 1pm for 45 minutes (no calls will be taken and front counter duty will not be provided during in this time).*
- *no Ministerial or Executive briefings including FOIs will be provided.*
- *will in emergency situations, claim paid overtime rather than accepting Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) for any out of hours work.*
- *will refer all unallocated cases and cases that contribute to an unreasonable workload to their Regional Director."*

All members are encouraged to support this industrial action.

For further enquiries, please contact PSA Industrial Officer Vanessa Ravenhill on phone (08) 8205 3251 or email vr@cpsu.asn.au

PSA WORKING FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

25/03/2009

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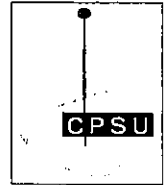
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PSA/CPSU BRIEF

INFORMATION UPDATE



TO ALL PSA MEMBERS IN
DEPARTMENT FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

FAMILIES SA INDUSTRIAL ACTION UPDATE

Public Service Association (PSA) Worksite Representatives met on Tuesday 11th November 2008 to receive a report from PSA Industrial Officers in relation to the Industrial Campaign currently underway in Families SA and to decide upon further action.

Members continue to be dismayed by the Government's lack of commitment to Child Protection and unanimously passed the following resolution.

PREAMBLE

This meeting of Families SA PSA Worksite Representatives, acknowledges the commitment demonstrated by the Department to provide additional resources to the Child Protection system by approving the allocation of extra vehicles and telephones to District Centres and the filling of 13 – 15 positions. However, these commitments will provide a marginal improvement and will leave upwards of 50% of cases unallocated and children unattended.

MOTION

"Members condemn the Government for allowing the inadequate funding arrangements to continue which jeopardises the safety of 100s of children in the community, including Guardianship of the Minister children.

Members demand that the 4% budget savings imposed on Families SA be lifted. This budget cut, has in part, resulted in 60 vacant positions not being filled.

Members demand that further funding be allocated to adequately resource Child Protection in South Australia.

Members call on the Minister to seek further funding from Treasury to ensure that all cases can be allocated to a Child Protection worker.

Members will meet in a fortnight to discuss any progress in the above issues."

PSA members reiterate their goal is to prevent children being left in dangerous situations and to provide better support to children who had been removed by the department for this reason.

Members should continue to participate in the member endorsed Industrial Action. Solidarity amongst members is essential to the success of this campaign. Should management seek to interfere or act inappropriately towards member contact the PSA immediately.

Please direct any enquiries to your Worksite Representative or Industrial Officer Vanessa Ravenhill on vr@cpsu.asn.au

PSA WORKING FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

25/03/2009

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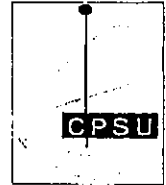


PSA/CPSU

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TO ALL PSA MEMBERS IN FAMILIES SA

CRISIS RESPONSE UNIT MEMBERS DEMAND ACTION!

Public Service Association(PSA) members met on Friday 24th October 2008 to receive a report of the Department for Families and Communities(DFC) response to members demands for added resources and improvement to employment arrangements, which would ensure improved service delivery to the community.

Members are disgusted that the Government and DFC continue to inadequately fund child protection across the State and resolved to take the fight up with the Minister. Members passed the following resolution:

"That this meeting of Crisis Response Unit PSA members condemns the department's continued inability to affectively resolve the chronic failings of the child protection system and will take this matter up with the Minister.

As a show of good faith members will accept the Department's commitment to fill the two identified vacant 0.5FTE positions and will now lift the bans on filling car log books.

CRU members acknowledge the support and commitment demonstrated by fellow Families SA PSA members and will join in any Industrial Campaign that members commit to.

Members will meet to discuss the Ministers response on Wednesday 29th October 2008."

If you have any questions or queries please contact your Worksite Representative or PSA Industrial Officers Jean-Guy Townsend on 8205 3233 or email jgt@cpsu.asn.au.

PSA MEMBERS WORK TOGETHER, WIN TOGETHER!

28/10/08

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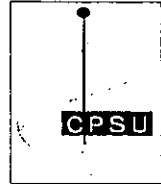
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TO ALL PSA MEMBERS IN FAMILIES SA

UPDATE ON MODBURY DISTRICT CENTRE INDUSTRIAL ISSUES

Public Service Association Worksite Representative Teri Farley and Industrial Officer Vanessa Ravenhill met with Department for Families and Communities and Families SA management representatives to address the issues raised in the motion carried by PSA members in Modbury District Centre on Thursday 21 February 2008.

The discussion at the meeting is summarised in the correspondence detailed below:

“The current temporary contract for the position of Senior Practitioner PO2 will be extended to 14 March 2008. This will provide the opportunity to review the work at hand within this temporary role. This position is a PO1 chart position and the substantive occupant is due to return from leave by 17 March 2008.

Ms Marj Ellis, Regional Director, will also arrange for an independent review of the work of the current temporary PO2 to provide for appropriate allocation of any cases currently being managed within this role. This will ensure explicit direction is provided to assist in the management of work as a result of the PO2 position not continuing beyond March.

Ms Ellis expressed that Executive have constantly reinforced that no person's case load should be more than is reasonable. To this end, Ms Ellis is prepared to attend a staff and leadership meeting at the office to clarify this position and respond to staff queries.

During the meeting, it was discussed that the staff within the Centre, and other staff across Families SA, provide an essential service and are acknowledged for the difficulties they face in determining those cases which need to be considered “unallocated work”. It is important that the local Manager is able to support staff in making decisions about the allocation of cases if the workload is too high.

I trust that this summarises the position agreed at our meeting today, and I understand that industrial action will therefore not be implemented. Confirmation of this would be appreciated.”

PSA members at Modbury will meet to discuss the proposal and provide feedback to management as soon as possible.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact PSA Industrial Officer Vanessa Ravenhill by email: vr@cpsu.asn.au or phone: 8205 3251.

PSA WORKING FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

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