



'Cornerstone or Tombstone? Workforce development in the non-government health and community services sector.'
Knowledge Café on September 17th 2009

Summary Report

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Programme

9.00	Registration & coffee	
9.15	Welcome and introductory remarks	Mavis Zutshi Development & Training Manager, SACOSS
9.20	<i>'Beyond the coalface? - the way forward for workforce development.'</i>	Professor Ed Carson Social Policy Research Group University of South Australia
10.00	<i>How does SA fare with sector workforce development compared to the other States?</i>	Karen Grogan Executive Director, SACOSS
10.30	Knowledge café briefing	Mavis Zutshi
Table I. Daphne Gum Room	WFD - the individual employee's perspective	<i>Facilitator</i> Marie Smith, Workforce Development Officer, CANH
Table O. Main hall	WFD - the employing organisation's perspective	<i>Facilitator</i> Janet Coster, Executive Manager, Life's for Living
Table S. Board Room, SACOSS office	WFD - the community / health services sector perspective	<i>Facilitator</i> Andris Banders, Executive Officer, SANDAS
11.45	Refreshment break	
12 noon	Feedback from KC tables	Facilitators

12.30	<i>The opportunities for the community/health services sector in the award modernisation process</i>	Katrine Hildyard, Branch Secretary, ASU SA & NT
12.50	Next steps and closing remarks	Mavis Zutshi
1.00	Lunch	

1. Presentations

Introductory remarks

Mavis Zutshi welcomed colleagues and outlined the objectives of the event. These were to inform SACOSS' policy position and advocacy role on sector workforce development by:

- Harvesting good ideas & best practice
- Identifying key priorities of sector organisations
- Exploring avenues for co-operation & further action
- Identifying potential synergies

Some tangible outcomes will be the production of a series of inter-linked reports on workforce development issues in the sector that are informed by feedback from this event. SACOSS will also be drawing on the ideas shared today to build the work of SCHS Campaign and will aim to take the agenda forward through SACOSS & the Peaks Forum

'Beyond the coalface? The way forward for workforce development.'

Professor Ed Carson, Social Policy Research Group, UniSA

Ed Carson summarized some of the key trends in financial pressures and labour force dynamics that are currently impacting on sector workforce development. He revisited the familiar demographic and structural factors which exacerbate the severe recruitment and retention problems that the sector faces. Recent research by ACOSS identifies a 50/50 balance of preventable to non-preventable departures within the sector. Despite agency-level attempts to find 'soft' solutions to this preventable 'skills-drain', sector-wide responses remain patchy and ineffectual. Ed offered a redefined concept of 'worker resilience' that is supported within a 'learning organisation', as one component of the broader strategy (including competitive wages and manageable workloads) required to resolve retention problems.

'How does SA fare with sector workforce development compared to the other States?'

Karen Grogan, Executive Director, SACOSS

Karen Grogan clarified the relationship between workforce development and workforce planning and highlighted the key environmental, political and organisational issues facing the sector in SA. SACOSS has found that workforce development is a unifying concern across the sector. Despite its difficulties, the health and community services industry is the second largest employing industry in the state, surpassed only by the retail trade. Karen

described a picture of uneven development nationally, with the non-government sector pursuing different workforce development issues in the individual States and Territories. These include the indexation of community services funding; the development of compacts between government and community sector; portable long-service leave as an entitlement; pay equity cases as in Queensland, and training and career development initiatives. SACOSS (with the Strong Community Healthy State Campaign) is currently exploring a number of these areas. The findings will be brought together in a series of interlinked reports, which focus on national level developments; state-wide developments; and successful strategies and models. Feedback from this event will inform the reports.

The opportunities for the Community sector in the Award Modernisation Process.

Katrine Hildyard, Branch Secretary, ASU SA & NT.

Katrine Hildyard outlined the changing industrial relations policy environment in which this process is located. She detailed some of the complexities and tensions within the massive streamlining and rationalizing process underway but highlighted the opportunities it also affords the sector. These include the removal of anomalies such as state differentials, commonality in terms of instruments, the opportunity to tackle pay equity and low pay issues through bargaining and campaigns and the chance to broaden the scope of workforce development concerns beyond wages alone. The ASU's National Plan sets out its position on key aspects many of which directly benefit the sector and its workforce. Katrine stressed that working together would be the critical success factor and that there is already a positive track record of this in SA through the SCHS Campaign.

3. Feedback from Knowledge Café tables

The Knowledge Café tables focused on three perspectives:

- *Workforce development and the individual employee*
- *Workforce development and the employing organisation*
- *Workforce development and the community/health services sector*

Participants were asked to focus their thoughts on priorities, opportunities and actions.

3.1 Workforce development and the individual employee

Priorities

- Workers need to be shown their experience is valued, in other ways than offering more training
- Community services staff can see training, higher wages, conditions etc. as taking them away from delivering services, or that they're being "selfish" – need to frame improvements in these individual conditions in language that highlights the benefits to the organization and quality of services delivered
- Interest + awareness re: industry
- School transition, attracting young workers
- Partnerships – relationships
- Clarity of pathways

Opportunities

- Smaller organizations to share resources
- Training – RPL as an option to recognize (within organizations) who has particular skills and qualities
- Mentors – government-funded subject experts, free
- Gap learning
- Partnerships

Actions

- Advertise the breadth and scope of opportunities available in the sector to attract young workers (including clearly defined career paths)
- Development of a mandatory 'induction' training package for all sector workers providing a foundation on which to build skills and specific expertise
- Identify and utilise alternative training models e.g. RPL, mentoring and supervision
- Reduce use of short, fixed-term contracts to allow for long-term development

More detailed notes can be found at Appendix 1.

3.2 *Workforce development and the employing organisation*

Priorities

- How to manage a diverse staff and volunteers
- Training – getting access to it; making it appropriate and creative; doing it smarter
- Ageing workforce – preparing for and utilising
- Sharing resources where feasible to create better access
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Opportunities

- Long term contracts
- Flexibility in an ageing workforce
- Better utilization of volunteers
- Creativity and marketing to attract workers
- Utilising working mums
- Collaborative work on training and sharing best practice
- In-house training
- Mentoring
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Actions

- Develop opportunities for mentoring
- Develop opportunities for sharing best practice
- Develop workforce development plans with organisational focus
- Improve leadership capacity
- Develop organisational training programme
- Ensure workforce strategy addresses bullying
- Resources need to match responsibilities

3.3 Workforce development and the community/health services sector

Priorities

- Being able to forecast future make-up of workforce and skills needs to be equipped to meet challenges. This requires clear timescales to mitigate unpredictability.
- Ability to have portability of all employment terms and conditions for employees moving within the sector
- Quality of training and link to clear career pathways
- Workforce development should apply to volunteers
- Negotiate a fair deal for funding i.e. being paid on the basis of what services actually cost. Re-examine unit costs e.g. change to work practices – staff attending meetings which takes time away from front-line service delivery
- Job redesign
- Safeguarding volunteers to prevent them from being substituted for paid staff
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Opportunities

- Opportunity to communicate and collaborate within the sector in terms of negotiating 'adequate' funding for services (with Gov't too). Currently a gap.
- To negotiate the basis of service delivery in terms of quality outcomes rather than just being measured on delivery of numbers. Now is the time to be pitching these discussions with state government funders. Ensure that reporting requirements are proportionate to amount of funding.
- For Commissioners to engage with the sector in developing appropriate tender specs.
- Opportunities in money following client
- Recognition of intellectual capacity/experiences of workers in the sector
- Harness gains from progress made in other States
- Influence Award Modernisation and new Compact and the equal pay case
- Opportunity to ramp up these issues via SCHS Campaign

Actions

- Revisit tendering specs so they explicitly build in dissemination costs to improve sharing of good practice and organisational learning
- Standardisation of practice across the country e.g. funding, training, work conditions etc.
- Internal dialogue within the sector about where we want to be – 'Be the driver'/'don't be the driver!'

- Funding to conduct pilots to look at new models of service/career design
- Communication strategy to recruit people into the sector& retain experienced workers
- Re-examine relationship with volunteers by the sector to prevent misuse due to being under pressure
- Capacity-building to effectively engage volunteers

Appendix 1

Detailed notes

Table I – The individual perspective on workforce development

Facilitator: Marie Smith Scribe: Lucas De Boer

Marie's question: What can help individual workers "grasp the nettle" and move on with workforce development?

Group 1

Elizabeth Tyson, Ben Heyward, Peter Wilkes, Ania Twardowski, Phil Farrow

- Most rapid increase of numbers of people are older people moving into the sector from other areas – many are part-time workers, and they want a genuine part-time job, not to be juggling two or three very small jobs – particularly a problem in regional/rural areas
- Attracting younger people is a significant problem – the breadth and scope of opportunities in the sector need to be advertised more widely, especially those elements that are particularly appealing to young people
- Skills and training need to be commensurate with what people find themselves doing in their employment
- Incentives – training should be offered to volunteers
- Smaller employers in the sector have great difficulty in providing training – difficult to find appropriate training, lack of funds, lack of time, lack of structural capability to undertake training. This is not such a problem for larger corporate services
- Part-time workers don't necessarily have time to go off-site for training
- Types of training available are quite limited – e.g. you can get funding to provide training in a particular certificate, but there is no funding for developing "skill sets"
- A mandatory, "induction"-style training package given to all workers in the sector, not necessarily a particular certificate, but one that provides some core competencies that can be built on and taken in a specific direction in the future
- Clarity of career pathway is necessary for attracting workers
- Partnerships and mergers need to be considered in very different and separate ways
- There are many partnerships that can be made, e.g. between workers and clients, between organizations, between funding bodies and organizations
- General discussion on mentoring structures, the responsibilities and complexities of mentoring roles, how to plan and manage large numbers of staff through a single or very few mentors
- Mentors who are more experienced workers from within the organization can be an excellent informal retention tool, build morale, and don't cost very much either

Group 2

Sonia Hilton, Katrine Hildyard, Mark Waters, Jo Elliss

- What keeps Gen Y in the workforce? Access to up-to-date/cutting-edge technological tools
- Casual staff – can feel they've been left by the wayside, not getting the entitlements (training etc.) that other staff do, despite mechanisms such as performance reviews being available
- Casual staff are relief staff, hence they can be paid high wages twice over, so the extra cost of training can be unsustainable for organizations
- Community services staff can see training, higher wages, conditions etc. as taking them away from delivering services, or that they're being "selfish" – need to frame improvements in these individual conditions in language that highlights the benefits to the organization and quality of services delivered
- Individual workers' expectations of their career in the community services sector can be depressed or suppressed in favour of focusing solely on the needs of clients, e.g. ignoring OH&S protocols to ensure that individual clients receive services
- Need to identify alternate models of training rather than formal, sit-down sessions e.g. supervision, mentoring, RPL
- The formation of partnerships between organizations is unfortunately often dependent on who is managing those organizations at the time
- Training is never free – why should the community sector assume that we shouldn't have to pay for it? The real cost is in time, loss of service delivery etc.
- Need to ensure that the culture within organizations allows for open critique of workplace practices, and make sure that staff are comfortable with performance appraisals, and don't see workplace training and change as imposed by management without consultation – openness in the workplace means individuals are happier to contribute to conversations about skills development in their organization and in the sector more widely
- Emphasis on performance appraisal and targets can mean people view workforce development as a negative thing
- Use of fixed-term contracts needs to stop, to allow for development over the long-term

Group 3

Christine Inkster, Peter Heyworth, Carol Mohan, Sandy Turnbull

- Training is a high priority, but much is undertaken in-house, so many organizations are searching for appropriate accredited training
- Flexible approach to training is necessary for community sector organizations
- The main problem for workers is that there is too much work, and it is too complex – people do extra hours for no extra pay, and without support they can't keep it up and leave the organization. In essence, people have no time to attend training

- People would like to be looking at bigger issues, but they are too busy moving from one crisis to another to be able to stop and take stock – training is the “icing on the cake”, not a core concern for many workers
- Workers need to be shown they and their experience are valued in ways other than being offered more training
- Mentors should be drawn from within organizations, not necessarily from above the worker being mentored
- Often expectations on volunteers are at least as significant as those on paid staff, e.g. complying with legislation and maintaining professional skills, and supporting volunteers is often a job in its own right