**MEDIA STATEMENT**

Tuesday 18 September 2012

**Parramatta Community Services Staff walk out over understaffing**

Child protection staff at the Parramatta Community Service Centre (CSC) have this afternoon become the 10th office in NSW to walk off the job, voicing their concerns about the impact of inadequate staffing, according to the Public Service Association.

The Parramatta CSC runs at a vacancy rate of almost 30%, leaving just 38 positions filled.

The regional office, which services between Auburn and Lithgow and is responsible for supporting both CSCs in the Metro West Region as well as NGOs that look after child protection issues will also stop work, becoming the first regional office in the state to take such action.

PSA Assistant Secretary Steve Turner said understaffing and a lack of resources means the overwhelming majority of vulnerable children being brought to the attention of Community Services are not being seen by caseworkers.

“Chronic understaffing means only one in ten children reported to Community Services are receiving face-to-face visits from caseworkers in NSW,” Mr Turner said today.

“Child Protection workers at Parramatta and across the state have been placed in the impossible position where they simply do not have the resources to follow up children assessed at being most at risk of harm.

“The Government is clearly failing some of the most vulnerable members of our community – children needing its protection.

“Caseworkers and other Community Services staff say unless the State Government starts filling caseworker vacancies and providing better resources, preventable child protection incidents will keep on happening.

“Parramatta is the 10th office to stop work highlighting that the problem is widespread and of concern to everyone in Community Services, no matter where they work.

“That the regional office too decided to also stop work shows that they can look across the entire region and see the devastating effects of the high vacancy rates in community services.

“There are vacancy rates of up to 30% for caseworkers at Parramatta, while other offices are struggling to cope with vacancy rates as high as 40%.

“The State Government must fill all Community Services vacancies – not just caseworkers, but the frontline staff who support caseworkers to do their job with vulnerable children and families.

“It should urgently address the failure of the computer system designed to free up caseworker time and other administrative issues keeping staff desk bound rather than out meeting children and families.”

**Parramatta CSC and the adjoining Metro West Regional Offices voted today at 1pm to stop work between 2-3pm today, Tuesday 18 September.**

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