



13 May 2016

Community Services Direction to use Workload planner

Community Services: work overload major health issue for caseworkers

On 9 December last year your union, the PSA, released a bulletin about its continuing direction to members to use the Workload Planner.

Workload continues to be a significant issue in Community Services. This has an impact on members' health and wellbeing, and can also contribute to bullying and harassment issues.

Gathering data on workload and hours of work

Over the past three months, the PSA has conducted surveys in a number of districts relating to workload. These surveys support anecdotal reports from members and delegates that workload is extremely high and significant numbers of staff are forfeiting hours each fortnight, over and above the 14-hour flex roll over amount.

PSA organisers in the workplace

The PSA's Organising Team has had a high focus on workload as the key issue in Community Services and has conducted 99 visits to Community Services sites since our bulletin on 9 December.

Child Protection by numbers – don't compromise your practice – take steps to protect yourself

It has been reported to the PSA members are experiencing unprecedented pressure from senior management to increase productivity, flowing from the current Community Services strategy to

improve Districts, CSCs and individual performance by introducing the Child Protection and OOHC League Table.

Haven't been visited lately? Email us to request a visit from a PSA organiser:

FACSOrganising@psa.asn.au

Members are concerned that by using the league table, each CSC, Manager and Caseworker is ranked based on a broad spectrum of statistics extrapolated from KiDS. It would appear that the previous direction adopted through Practice First towards improving work culture, quality assessment and relationship based practice has been sacrificed in the quest to focus on outcomes in statistical reports. However, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that improved productivity statistics only look good in the short term and do not lead to ongoing positive outcomes for children at risk. The short-term increase in productivity numbers also comes at the cost of workers' health and safety and erodes quality practice, ultimately resulting in poorer outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Excessive workloads

Members are also raising concerns about practice caseload-allocation benchmarks. More members are reporting management is allocating work to caseworkers based on arbitrary caseload benchmarks, regardless of individual capacity. The recent surveys by the PSA have revealed that 80 percent of respondents are regularly working excessive hours, and forfeiting flex hours, in an attempt to manage their workloads. There are

reports of threats of performance management if targets are not met, and for some, disciplinary proceedings have been initiated on the basis that staff are “not adhering to departmental policy” in not completing work, such as SARA and case plans, within procedural timeframes.

Poor practice openly encouraged

Members have reported that senior management are openly encouraging Caseworkers to prioritise the creation of J&Ds, SARAs and case plans (attaching blank templates) on KiDS in order to increase performance statistics in the monthly reporting cycle. Due to excessive caseloads, Caseworkers are consequently not afforded the time to complete assessment narratives in a timely manner.

Draft records and retrospective assessments

The PSA, along with members and delegates, has serious concerns at the erosion of quality as Caseworkers are being encouraged to only enter draft KiDS records at the time of intervention, and to complete the records weeks later. Casework staff should not leave themselves exposed by engaging in this practice as you will be personally held to account when things go wrong. Do not compromise your practice. You need to protect yourself first to effectively protect the children you work with.

Vicarious trauma and burn out

Research has very clearly linked working in the child protection system to high rates of secondary and vicarious trauma. Contributing factors include excessive workloads and absence of regular and effective supervision. The PSA has already raised concerns about this with Community Services.

Despite our approaches work environments are becoming increasingly hazardous due to the issues described above, as well as pressures arising from:

- OCG accreditation
- Unreliable IT systems
- An unstable KiDS system
- Lack of regular and quality supervision
- Under-resourced administrative support
- The critical shortage of foster care placements
- The need to supervise increasing numbers of children in motels
- Workers concerns over job security linked to the pending restructure of Districts and outsourcing of Community Services.

PSA direction to use the Workload Planner

Now, more than ever, all caseworker members must take steps to protect themselves from work overload and undertake proper planning and documentation of your work.

The Workload Planner provides this protection and allows Caseworkers and Managers Casework to work safely and effectively in their increasingly hazardous work environments.

The PSA will continue to lobby the department and the Minister to take your concerns seriously and meet their legislative responsibilities by providing a safe workplace for their employees.

You can download the workload planner [HERE](http://psa.asn.au/community-services-direction-to-use-workload-planner/)
<http://psa.asn.au/community-services-direction-to-use-workload-planner/>

If you have any questions in relation to the use of the Workload Planner please approach your local delegate or contact the PSA
FACSOrganising@psa.asn.au

Join the PSA

membership.psa.asn.au

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PUBLIC SERVICES**

by protecting jobs and workplace rights

