

PSA direction to Community Services members – May 2018

Reason for the directions

For some time the PSA has been raising concerns about:

- » The unrealistic and unsafe expectation you must do more with less resources
- » Members working excessive and unsafe hours
- » Productivity targets imposed on Districts resulting in excessive workloads
- » More than 76 per cent of members reporting that excessive workloads and the impact of ChildStory is adversely affecting their psychological and physical health
- » ChildStory resulting in significantly more time doing administrative work
- » Child protection worker* attrition getting out of control as employees choose to leave – or are forced to leave – FACS due to excessive workloads and the current oppressive work environments.

**Child Protection workers include, caseworkers, casework specialists, casework support officers, managers casework, administrative support, psychologists, legal officers*

Managers are being pressured to push their staff harder than ever to meet productivity targets, yet there has been no increase in staff or resources to meet growing work demands and the increasing complexity of casework. Too many experienced – and even new – workers are leaving due to FACS turning a blind eye to inappropriate management behaviours, unsafe workloads and chronic bullying and harassment. The knock-on effect for those who remain is acute, with negative impacts on casework and employee health and safety.

Numbers and statistics have become the new mantra. Even children are now referred to as “units”. As a result, members have become disillusioned and the Practice Framework’s core principal of relationship based casework more elusive than ever.

In response, the PSA carefully crafted the attached directions with a view to support you in your workplace while not placing any child at risk.

- 1. PSA members are directed to use the Workload Planner (found [HERE](#) as well as WLP tool found [HERE](#) and FAQ found [HERE](#)) and not accept or allocate cases beyond a worker’s contracted hours or agreed paid overtime hours. Any case that you can not work on during a four-week Workload Planner period should NOT be allocated to you. This means that if a child/case has zero activity hours in your Workload Planner, that child is not to be allocated to you on ChildStory.**

Background:

The Workload Planner (WLP) tool is used by managers and caseworkers in planning casework activities for the children and families allocated to a particular caseworker. It also ensures that allocated caseloads are safe and manageable and not beyond workers contracted hours. If no planned work has been identified for a case, it should not be allocated to the caseworker as they should not be held accountable if something goes wrong. The department and the Minister should be accountable for work that cannot be allocated, not caseworkers and their managers. FACS



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Secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter had previously written to the PSA (26/08/2016) and stated that he was “very happy to reiterate our support for caseworkers who want to use the workload planner”.

- 2. PSA members are directed not to work excessive and unsafe hours which results in the forfeiture of hours, i.e. working in excess of 14 hours credit in any flex period. Members are reminded it is a legal requirement to accurately record all hours on your flex sheet. If you do unpaid work (i.e. overtime has not been approved) over a weekend then record the dates and hours worked in the section “Certified Correct” on your flex sheet.**

Background:

It is widely known child protection workers are working excessive hours in attempting to manage excessive workloads. The NSW Auditor General had previously identified this as a serious WHS issue and made a specific recommendation to address this (the department “develop mechanisms to centrally review flex time records to help ensure excessive flex time is not being accrued and forfeited by staff.”) To date FACS, Community Services have failed to act on this recommendation. Since this recommendation FACS has actually implemented work systems which result in allocation of excessive workloads knowing staff do not have the capacity and as a result are forced to work excessive and unsafe hours.

- 3. All PSA members are directed not to complete their Performance Development Plan (PDP) including participation in the E-Learning modules, or take part in any Performance Development Program planning or implementation activities. The Career Plan section and Performance Development Career Planning Tool are exempt.**

Background:

Members have complained that the PDP (Performance Development Plan) process has degenerated into a tick box exercise. The only part of the process of real worth is the Career Plan section and Performance Development Career Planning Tool which are exempted from the ban.

Our goals

1. FACS, in consultation with the PSA develop mechanisms, to centrally review flex time records to help ensure excessive flex time is not being accrued and forfeited by staff.
2. FACS undertake an audit of child protection workers’ flex sheets to identify employees who are forfeiting flex hours and report the findings to PSA and Health and Safety Reps.
3. FACS, in consultation with the PSA, to establish a safe system for allocation of work in line with the Workload Planner.



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4. FACS prioritises the simplification of ChildStory processes and directs all available resources to fixing the “in-house” problems and delay implementation Release 2.
5. FACS has safe systems of work and a culture which allows child protection staff to work in accordance with the principals of the Practice Framework.
6. That Community Services adheres to all agreed commitments with the PSA.

Next steps

We will provide further advice on any developments. Until this time the attached directions remain in place. It is crucial we stand united to achieve our goals. You need to protect yourself and your union is there to ensure you are safe at work.

For further information, please contact your workplace delegate, departmental committee delegate or PSA organiser.

