

Improved Action on Secondary/Vicarious Trauma and Workloads for Child Protection Workers

The Industrial Relations Commission handed down a decision today that assists workers in Community Services and possibly across government who are dealing with mental health pressures of work in their workplace. In particular, when you are exposed to vicarious trauma and excessive workloads. In *Kovic v SafeWork NSW* 2019 MSWIRComm 1010 the PSA assisted a worker Community Services Health and Safety Representative (HSR) for the past three years in getting action in the workplace about managing the mental health pressures in their workplace.

The decision (found [HERE](#)) found that a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) issued by the HSR under the WHS Act in 2017, that was later cancelled by SafeWork, was not lawfully cancelled and that the improvement notice stands. The Provisional Improvement Notice specified measures including:

PCBU must ensure so far as reasonably practicable the health and safety of workers by consulting with workers to develop and implement a safe system of work for:

- *preventing vicarious trauma and secondary trauma*
- *identifying and managing vicarious trauma and secondary trauma*
- review and revision of the organisation's systems of work for preventing and responding to the incidence of workplace vicarious trauma and secondary trauma.
- *PCBU, to consult as per S.4 and S.70 with the PSA and staff, to establish a process to determine fair, safe and achievable workloads for caseworkers, taking into account the complex nature of child protection work.*

The improvement notice is likely to lead to improvements across the agency as there are no specific frameworks to deal with these mental health issues locally nor the ability to develop these systems in the Illawara.

“This case shows why the PSA supports our elected HSR members in the workplace. HSRs are empowered under the WHS Act to consult and improve workplace safety,” said Troy Wright, PSA Acting General Secretary. “This HSR has basically taken on issue that is striking down so many of his work colleagues, and said time for his employer to get their act together.

“We hope with this decision that both FACS and SafeWork will be more willing to work with the workforce and the PSA to improve the mental safety around workloads and vicarious trauma for one of the more difficult jobs in the public sector of child protection.”

