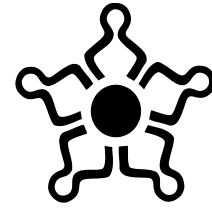


BRIEFING NOTE



May 31, 2018

TO: Stephanie Smith, President

FROM: Robert Duffy, Researcher,
Research & Interactive Services;

cc Judy Fox-McGuire, Component 6 Vice-President;
Maria Middlemiss, Component 12 Vice-President;
Brian Gardiner, Executive Assistant to the President;
Emet Davis, Director, Research & Interactive Services;
Simon Kelly, A/Coordinator, Research & Interactive Services;
Mike Eso, Regional Coordinator, Vancouver Island

SUBJECT: Results of member survey on the impacts of recent hiring in the Ministry of Children and Family Development

Background and sample

Based on ongoing meetings with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) through the MCFD-BCGEU Joint Working Group and ongoing consultations with members in Components 6 and 12, the BCGEU has closely monitored recent expansions in hiring of frontline staff by the Ministry. While the union is encouraged by the provincial government's recent efforts, there have also been reports of continuing problems with employee retention, turnover rates and other issues that may be diluting the positive impacts of new hiring.

To gain a clearer sense of what is happening "on the ground," the union decided to directly ask members in frontline MCFD positions about the impacts of additional hiring on working conditions, caseloads, and the overall quality of services to children and families.

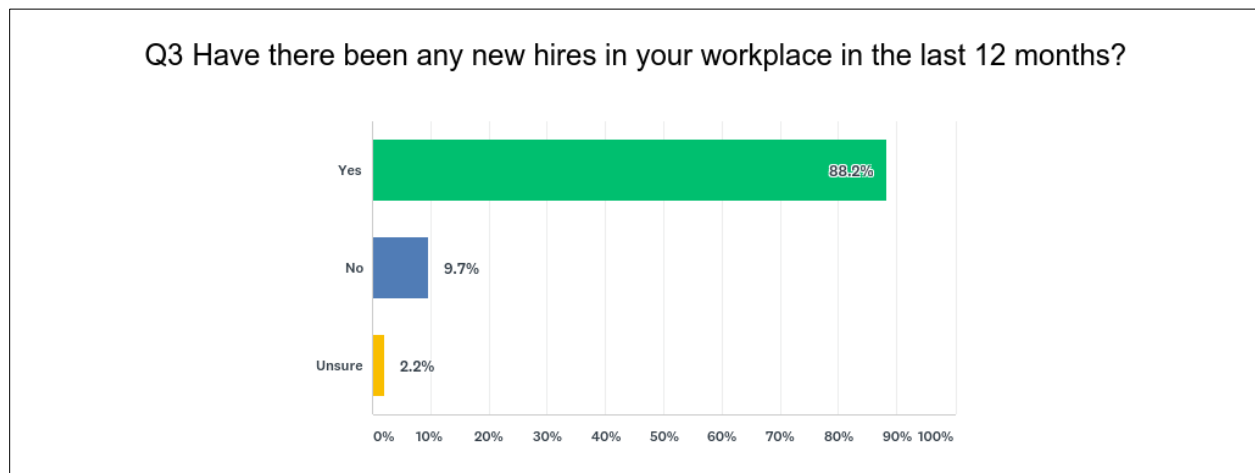
In March 2018, BCGEU Research and Interactive Services developed and distributed a survey seeking information on the workplace conditions of members working in frontline MCFD positions, with the aim of creating a clearer picture of what improvements have been made, and where work still needs to be done.

The survey was distributed to 2,674 members of Components 6 and 12 on March 15, 2018, and closed March 28, 2018. 880 members responded, for a response rate of 32.9 per cent. 75.8 per cent of respondents were from Component 6, and 17.7 per cent from Component 12. The remaining 6.6 per cent were unsure of their component.

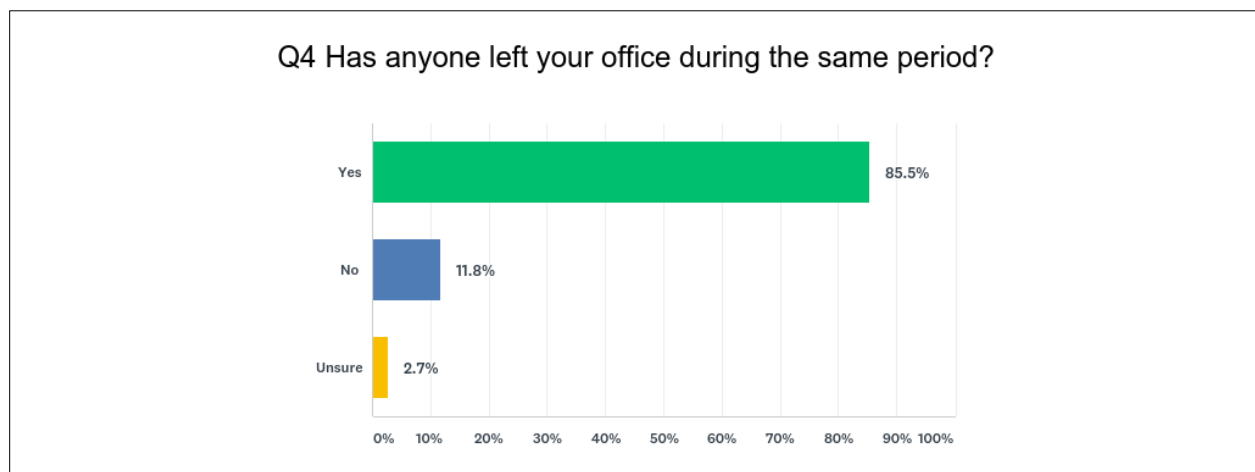
Findings

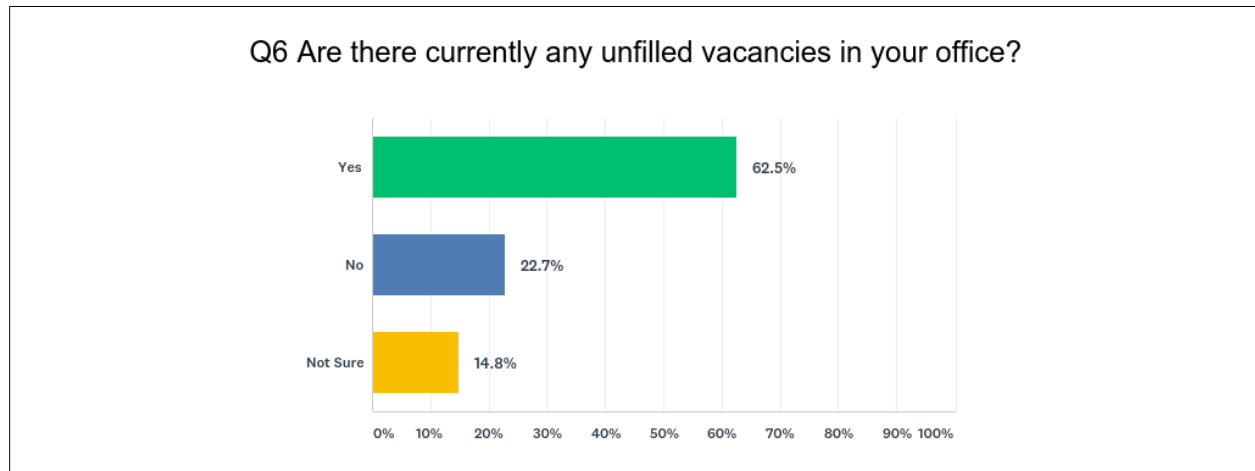
Hiring, staffing levels and turnover

The vast majority of respondents (88.2 per cent) reported new hiring in their workplace in the past 12 months.



However, almost the same number (85.5 per cent) reported staff leaving during the same period, raising the possibility that at least some of the new hiring is only covering replacement/turnover rather than increasing staff levels (or in some cases possibly not even keeping up with staff attrition). Adding further weight to this concern is the finding that 62.5 per cent of respondents also report unfilled vacancies in their offices, and only 22.5 per cent said all positions were filled.



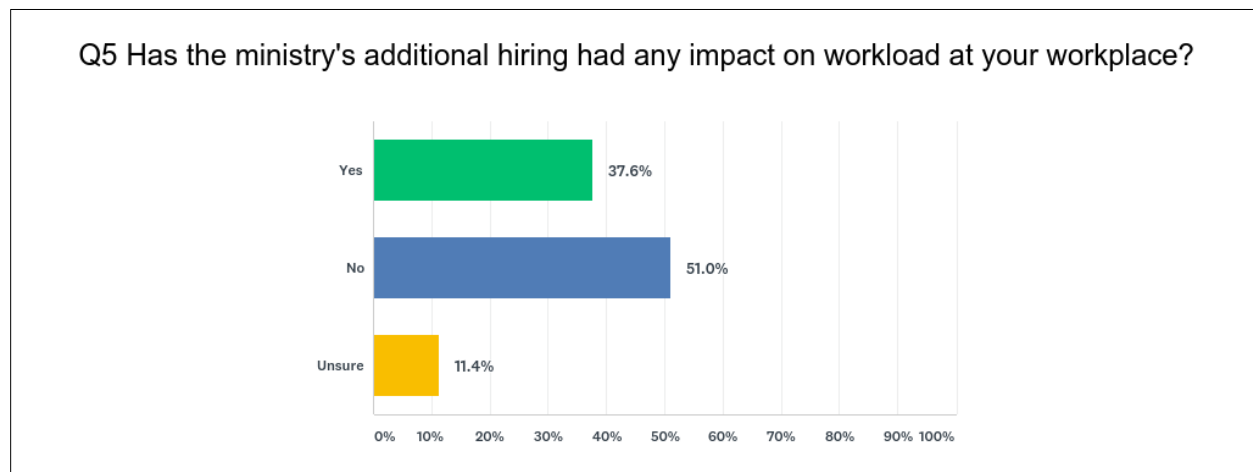


Many comments from survey respondents directly reported observation that new hiring is failing to keep up with retirements and other types of employee attrition (most notably problems with employee retention and high turnover). Examples include:

- "New workers continue to leave at a rate faster than can be hired."
- "New hires are thrown into caseloads without enough training. Then they get stressed and leave."
- "I have heard lots of new staff who aren't even two years into their career have an exit plan due to low wages, high caseloads, and high stress. MCFD needs to work on staff retention."
- "Although we have had new staff fill vacancies, we have had a high turnover (due to retirements, people leaving for other positions and other careers or going back to school)."
- "The same number left as are being replaced. We have very high turnover on the admin team and positions on the mental health team are often left unfilled."
- "We have a big turnover so they are always hiring new people."
- "Due to the high turnover in our office we are constantly severely understaffed."
- "People leave as fast as they are hired. Often new hires are thrown into busy caseloads and struggle. I've also seen many new hires quit within 1-2 years as there are many other work options out there that pay better and are less stressful."
- "[The new hires] all replaced retired staff so they are not additional."
- "[Our office] is struggling with retention and recruitment, leaving the staff burnt out and the families at risk."

Impact on workload

While new hiring seems to have affected workloads at many workplaces (37.6 per cent of respondents said "Yes"), a small majority (51 per cent) say that additional hiring has had no impact on workload where they work.



Worryingly, comments suggest that a lack of training resources means that new hiring has actually increased the workload for many respondents, at least in the immediate term. More than one-fifth of respondents (20.7 per cent) indicated increased workloads related to training new staff.

For some, this came from taking on mentoring and training duties in addition to their regular workload, while for some others it was a result of taking on a colleague's regular responsibilities while that colleague is assigned to training/mentoring duties.

Representative comments include:

- "Untrained new hires actually increase our workload."
- "It has caused an increase in workload as the new people have been unskilled, untrained and lacked the knowledge needed to do this work..."
- "New staff who arrive on the child protection teams have no previous experience, requiring junior staff to train them and neglect their own caseloads."
- "Good to have more staff but with new workers that need training and no experienced mentors available to train them, it adds to workload before it has any impact on reducing workload."
- "Due to no training provided to new administrative hires on government computer systems, it slows down the ability to move work forward quickly"
- "Hiring practices have little impact on workload when proper training is not implemented. Because of already high caseloads and/or novice work experience within the office, new hires do not have the opportunity to be mentored in ways that support their career development efficiently."
- "The Ministry hires people that often have no protection experience and staff are expected to train them even when workloads are high."
- "My workload has increased as two fully delegated workers left and a new hire has come."
- "A new hire is not the same as a long term delegated social worker. It takes 6-12 months before a new hire social worker becomes an asset to their team. The senior workers who are covering the empty caseloads are also the ones doing most of the training and mentoring."

Many respondents also cited inadequate hiring of administrative staff in the recent process, which they

say is creating bottlenecks (or exacerbating existing backlogs) in some offices and increasing workloads in administrative work.

Representative comments include:

- "The ratio of administrative staff to professionals does not seem to be sufficient and doesn't appear to be taken into consideration."
- "They are hiring professional staff but not the administrative component to support them."
- "For Admin, our work load increases with more hires in the office. More SW and SW Assistants were hired because of the high workload in this office. Our Admin is still the same size. The ratio of workers to Admin is double or triple the provincial standard."
- "More social workers are being added to teams, but no admin positions seem to be being created."
- "CYSN has been given SW Assistants on a temporary basis, however, these positions do not affect the admin workload."
- "Addition of front line social workers and CYMH clinicians has caused an increase in work to all admin positions."
- "We have several new workers, but no additional admin."

Positive comments about the impacts of new hiring were less common, but representative ones include:

- "It brought us up to capacity, so we weren't as stressed."
- "We are able to offer more Groups to our parents and their children [...] Prior to that, we did not have the staff for this."
- "It's been an amazing help to workload issues."
- "Eased workload of clinicians."
- "Reduced caseload so far."
- "An additional CYMH clinician (+1FTE) was hired, which has reduced our waitlist and related workload pressures."

Conclusion

This survey suggests recent hiring in MCFD seems to have had mixed results. While most respondents (88 per cent) report that there has been hiring over the past 12 months, slightly more than half say it has not had any impact on their workload. This may be due to high rates of attrition and turnover reported by respondents (85 per cent said staff had left their workplace over the past 12 months), and unfilled positions at many offices (as reported by 62.5 per cent of respondents). Comments suggest that contributing factors in high turnover include retirements, stress/burnout and new workers leaving due to dissatisfaction with working conditions and/or compensation.

More problematically, about one-fifth of those respondents who provided written comments indicated that training and mentoring responsibilities were actually increasing their workload, and that many new hires have not been adequately trained. Many commenters also indicated that hiring of administrative staff has not been keeping pace with the increased volume of work related to increases in social work staffing in some offices. While some respondents indicated positive impacts from recent hiring, the bulk of comments provided were critical, and complained of increased workloads or no meaningful change.