



Community & Public Sector Union
Civil Service Association of WA

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15 December 2015

Ms Margaret Quirk MLA
Chairperson, Community Development and Justice Standing Committee
Parliament House
GPO Box A11
PERTH WA 6837

lacdjsc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms. Quirk

RE: Transcript and Supplementary Evidence, Public Hearing, Department of Child Protection and Family Support 23 November 2015.

Thank you for the opportunity to correct the Transcript and provide Supplementary Evidence following the Public Hearing held as a part of the Agency Review into the Department of Child Protection and Family Support. A copy of the Transcript with suggested corrections is added.

We have also supplied Supplementary Evidence in two branches, these being:

- Issues we raised in our Opening Statement
- Issues raised by Committee Members during the Public Hearing

The issues raised in our Opening Statement are in the attached file.

Issues raised by Committee Members during the Public Hearing are addressed below.

Open Session

Mental Health Concerns for Staff at Department

Pg 5

Committee Member Murray asked:

“What monitoring is done of the caseworkers, their mental health et cetera, in the stressful job they do”.

In the first case study referred to in the closed session we have been informed by members that there was no ‘de-brief’, where senior staff meet with staff involved in the case to ‘check in’ on the

mental health or wellbeing of staff after an incident. We have also been informed that in the fourth case study listed; the 'de-brief' did not focus on the welfare of the workers involved and was exclusively about ascertaining the details of the case.

Psychologists

Pg 11

The Chair asked:

"We hear about shortage or waiting lists for things like child psychologists. How much does that impact on your members' work, the fact that, for example, the caseworker identifies a problem with a child but getting access to, say, a psychologist within the public system?"

At the Public Hearing on the 25th of November at which representatives of the Department gave evidence, it was stated that there were 50 psychologists employed by the Department.

Psychologists working at the Department have two different roles:

1) Consult:

This is where other staff will speak to them about children and families who would benefit from psychological services. Psychologists also provide input to Parenting Capacity Assessments and Psychological Assessments. Parenting Capacity Assessments are a major body of work that requires:

- Extensive observation time
- Recording and analysis with counter referencing.

Caseworkers have the skills to assist with the Parenting Capacity Assessments, but are only able to do so if they have the flexibility to reduce their case load, which can be problematic. Regardless of whether caseworker assistance can be provided the Parenting Capacity Assessments require a psychologist's input. When psychologists employed by the Department do not have the workload capacity to undertake these assessments, the work is outsourced. Outsourced Parenting Capacity Assessments can cost up to \$10,000 each.

2) Clinical Work:

This is where psychologists provide therapeutic assistance for children and families through consultation sessions.

We have received this feedback from a Child Protection Worker at a metropolitan office:

Due to workload issues, the psychologist at our District office does very little any clinical work. Most of their time is spent doing consult work. By and large, young people who are in need of psychological assistance are encouraged to go to their GP and receive 10 free sessions through the Medicare Mental Health Treatment Plan. However, only some psychologists are on the 'approved list' and can be used by children in contact with CPFS. Children who need specialised

psychological services need to have funding approved for 'Specialised Funding'. This is above and beyond the district office's normal budget.

We have also been told that at one metropolitan office FTE for psychologists was reduced from 3 in 2011 to 1 at present.

We have received this information from another Child Protection Worker at a metropolitan office:

We were informed that CPFS Psych Services would have limited capacity to provide therapeutic services and will be more available in a consultative role and providing Circle of Security training etc. If we want a child to be seen by a psychologist, there will need to be an application accepted for 'Special Purpose Funding'. This funding needs to be approved by Head Office.

The application for funding and approval process may take an average of a month or slightly longer. Then an appointment has to be made with an external psychologist which can take up to three months.

A lot of the time it is left to us to visit the child and to assist as much as we can until a psychologist appointment can be organised. Meanwhile, potentially damaged and distressed children are waiting for this specialist assistance.

Most of the time when our caseworkers do try to refer children to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (Department of Health), the referral is not accepted by the service.

Closed Session

Potential Foster Carers-Clarification

Pg 2

Rikki Hendon:

"Our members have been saying to us that some people who have expressed interest in fostering children with the Department have to wait up to six months for any follow-up".

After seeking clarification from members, we have been informed that it can take up to six weeks for an initial Expression of Interest to be followed-up and up to six months for a person's application to be processed and approved as a foster carer.

Case Study

Pg. 4: Our understanding is that Police were aware and involved in the case study in question.

If the Committee requires any further information or clarification on the information provided we are available to assist.

As we stated at the Public Hearing, the inadequate resourcing of the department is hindering the management of children at risk. We believe that the information we have provided warrants the

Committee to conduct a broader inquiry in the department. A broader inquiry would allow a thorough investigation of issues we have touched on as well as an exploration of solutions to ensure that every child brought to the Department's attention is given the attention and care they deserve.

Yours sincerely



Rikki Hendon
Branch Assistant Secretary

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