

## Workforce development in the non-government community services sector Forum report



### **Introduction**

The Tasmanian Learning and Skills Authority (TLSA) convened an industry forum to focus on skills issues in the non-government community services sector.

The forum was held in Hobart on 27 March 2007. It aimed to develop a more cohesive and informed relationship between industry, training providers, purchasers of training and other stakeholders in skills training and workforce development.

This paper discusses the priorities for workforce development in the sector and identifies the strategies and/or actions that can be implemented to address skills issues.

### **Background**

The demand for community services (and subsequently training and skill development) has grown across all sub-sectors in Tasmania, and in some areas the growth has been substantial.

Decisions about training, as recently as two years ago, were essentially a function of assessing patterns of consumer demand and workforce turnover (e.g. the ageing workforce in some sectors).

There is now an understanding that organisations have to make more strategic decisions in relation to the workforce development needs of their businesses. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that the Health and Community services sector is only second to retail with the largest number of employees in the state. In May 2006, the retail trade employed 35.6% of the workforce while the health and community services sector employed 26.6%<sup>1</sup>.

In November 2006, 7400 people were employed in approximately 350 organisations across the Community Services sector in Tasmania. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey, unpublished data, May 2006

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 6291.0.55.003 - Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Nov 2006

## Skills shortages

In 2005, the Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training (OPCET) contracted the Tasmanian Council of Social Service to develop a Training Demand Profile<sup>3</sup> with specific focus on the non government Community Services sector. Skills shortages were identified in the following occupations:

- Child care workers including co-ordinators
- Support workers in the aged care and disability care fields (both residential and non-residential)
- Case managers (generalist and specialist) in a range of industry sectors, including the employment services sector
- Non-clinical support workers in the mental health sector (residential and non-residential) community development workers
- Tenancy managers and support workers in the housing sector
- Brokers in disability services
- Assessment specialists in community care.

OPCET's Industry Liaison Officer has validated the currency of these shortages across a range of industry sub-sectors. In addition, there is a growing need for qualified and experienced sector managers, Indigenous Health Care and Drug and Alcohol workers.

## Forum

The forum examined skills shortages and training demand issues across the following non-government community services sub-sectors:

- Disability services
- Mental health
- Social housing and supported accommodation services
- Drug, alcohol and other dependencies
- Non-government employment services
- Aged care (non-residential) and community care.

The forum was attended by approximately 70 people from a range of stakeholder groups including:

- Tasmanian Council of Social Service
- TAFE Tasmania and private training providers
- Consumer groups and peak bodies
- Employers

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.education.tas.gov.au/vet/documents/community\\_services\\_non-government.doc](http://www.education.tas.gov.au/vet/documents/community_services_non-government.doc)

- Unions
- Representatives from Economic Development, Treasury and Finance, Health and Human Services and Education

### **Forum Presentations**

- Di Lawson, CEO of the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council - ***Skills Shortages and Workforce Development Challenges in the Community Services Sector – The National Experience.***
- Paul Mayne, CEO of Langford Support Services - ***Recruitment Challenges in the Support Services Sector – an Employer’s Perspective.***
- Mike Brough, Director Regulation and Support, Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training – ***Enhancing Skills for the Tasmanian Workforce.***
- Mat Rowell, CEO of TasCOSS – ***Moving Towards an Industry Plan – an Update on the Industry Planning Process.***

### **Major drivers of skills shortages**

The following factors were identified as the major drivers of skills shortages in the sector:

- Competition with other industries for workers
- Limited career pathways and lack of articulation to higher education or qualifications
- Lack of knowledge about the sector
- Poor wages and conditions
- Ageing population
- Training perceived as a cost, not an investment by employers – fear of loss rather than retention
- Shift work

While it is recognised that volunteers are providing many hours of support within the sector, their needs and demand for skills training have not been considered as part of this forum. It is noted that some of the drivers of skills shortages impacting the paid workforce, is also reflective of the volunteer workforce.

## **Priorities for the sector**

1. Promote the industry to all age groups; focus on opportunities for employment and the value of working in the community services sector.
2. Establish entry level training requirements for the industry.
3. Increase engagement between industry and the training sector (public and private) to develop a collaborative approach to skills issues.
4. Establish an association for support workers with the aims of improving the image of support work and uniting workers to advocate as one voice.
5. Improved wages and conditions for employees.
6. Investment in IT to provide educational opportunities and improve communication and continuity of client information and record keeping between sub-sectors
7. Provide co-ordinated training and professional development opportunities across the sector and ongoing resourcing for workforce development.
8. Create an industry plan. Adopt a collaborative approach between sub sectors and government to solve workforce challenges.

## **Strategies and/or actions are required to address skills issues**

It was not intended that the forum would gain specific commitments from government or business, however, many opportunities exist within the sector to address some of the identified skills issues.

Suggestions from forum participants:

1. Establish a cross-sector working group to develop and conduct a marketing campaign. Find good role models and use them to develop a positive culture and image of work in the sector.
2. Define entry level training requirements. Gain a commitment from employers and training providers to recognise skills that already exist. Introduce incentives for career progression. Better

understand where VET, university and/or other training are appropriate.

3. Establish an association to advance the role of support workers and advocate for better pay and conditions. Issues with current award entitlements - staff with higher level skills cost more so there's a position focus rather than a quality of service focus.

4. Raise awareness of the reducing labour pool. Implement self-help strategies. Talk to other industries and investigate service models and technology used by successful organisations and companies as there might be something the sector can use.

GP Assist <sup>4</sup> is an example of how information technology is used to provide a fully-integrated response to patients requiring urgent after hours care.

5. Identify barriers for accessing unemployed or other groups currently not in the labour force. Be flexible when recruiting older workers. The Mature Aged Workers Giving in Care (MAGIC<sup>5</sup>) program aims to place mature-aged workers in the Community Services industry, specifically in the areas of Aged Care, Children's Services and Youth Work. In addition, this program explores how these workplaces can recruit non-traditional workers, such as males, into childcare.

6. Increase interaction and improve consultation between industry, government and the training sector. The sector needs to define the roles and responsibilities it wants for its staff, so that training and qualifications are tailored appropriately.

7. Advocate for longer funding cycles for service delivery. Funding guidelines vary between Commonwealth and State. Services agreements on a 4 or 5 year funding cycle would be useful.

### **Commitments on actions – who could do what?**

A panel of industry, government and business leaders was convened to participate in an open forum. The opportunity was given for participants to ask questions of the panel.

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<sup>4</sup> GP Assist (Tasmania) Pty Ltd is an initiative funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide after hours General Practice support to GPs throughout Tasmania, via the GP Assist advice centre which manages and directs patients' after hour calls through its triage service.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.cshisc.com.au/load\\_page.asp?ID=68](http://www.cshisc.com.au/load_page.asp?ID=68)

<b>Mike Brough</b>	Director Regulation and Support	Office of Post-Compulsory Education & Training
<b>Lynne Fitzgerald</b>	Manager Labour & Employment	Department of Economic Development
<b>Mat Rowell</b>	Chief Executive Officer	Tasmanian Council of Social Service
<b>Kaye Thompson</b>	Chief Executive Officer	Family Based Care (North)
<b>Di Lawson</b>	Chief Executive Officer	Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council

**Q1. Are funds available for training older workers in this sector?**

Commonwealth funding (via DEST) is currently provided to subsidise mature aged apprentices under a "Skills for the Future" program but this only applies to traditional trades. Australians over the age of 25 who have not completed Year 12 or achieved a Certificate II qualification may qualify for a Work Skills Voucher valued at up to \$3000.00 to meet costs associated with basic training.

**Q2. What opportunities exist for School Based Traineeships (SBT) in the sector?**

Under COAG decisions and legislation, all barriers to undertake SBT's in the Community Services sector have been removed. Placements in Children's Services are underway and the Aged Care sector is now being considered. Employers now need to consider accepting SBT's in the workplace.

**Q3. Will advancements in technology create new roles that might attract young people to the sector?**

Advances in technology will undoubtedly create new roles in the community services sector in Tasmania. By having access to an online or 24 hours phone line, a range of services can be provided e.g. a district night nurse using surveillance to monitor patients.

**Q4. How do we address the mis-match between industry needs and what RTO's deliver?**

Training demand profiles inform OPCET of the priorities that exist for the Community Services sector. This influences funding for programs such as Tasmanian Skills Investment and Skills Equip programs.

**Q5. Why are there protracted time frames for the endorsement and implementation of training packages?**

There is concern the endorsement process takes too long. In Tasmania the new packages are implemented and funded as soon as practically possible, usually within 2 – 3 weeks. The National Quality Council is reviewing processes for training package development and review with the aim of streamlining timelines.

**Q6. What is an entry level qualification?**

While this is the sector's responsibility to determine, Certificate III is generally considered as entry level. Better dialogue between industry and RTO's is needed to establish the appropriate entry level requirement.

**Q7. How can the sector better manage work roles?**

Applying contemporary human resource management and practices is crucial for large organisations. Resources must be allocated to manage HR for 70 or more employees. Small businesses could consider outsourcing some HR e.g. payroll.

Family Based Care (North) has 350 employees and has its own HR section but had to lose a co-ordinator's position to fund the role.

While it's recognised that a competitive environment (for funding) is a barrier for the sector and poaching is a problem, it should consider opportunities to share HR services.

**Comment from TasCOSS:** - DHHS have funded us to deliver governance and other support to community service organisations. Community sector skills development training programs are funded from various program areas while OPCET funds some through their competitive bids program.

Inter- governmental communication is essential to reduce duplication and appropriately target training and development funds.

**Q8. An “Employer of Choice Awards” information session was held last year. Is there an opportunity to do this for the community services sector? What about a project officer to assist small businesses to enter awards?**

These awards celebrate and reward workplaces that adopt modern work practices and promote a work-life balance as part of a strategy to attract and retain skilled workers. Entries for this year’s awards closed on 12 April. These awards are a further opportunity to promote the community services sector.

**Q9. What about IR issues?**

There is still considerable confusion and lack of clarity about the impact of Work Choices legislation. Award conditions vary depending on whether workers are employed under a state or federal award. The new legislation can only be tested and settled on a case-by-case basis.

**Comment:** from Robin Wilkinson – A “love/hate relationship” exists between clients and carers. A focus on the client and their individual needs should be considered as part of developing the relationship between carers and clients. Training should be given to clients about receiving care and to carers in providing care as it’s often the most difficult aspect of the relationship to develop.

It appears that the industry has grown very quickly and the “client at the centre focus” appears to have diminished as a result.

**Summary: Future Direction and Key Themes**

**TasCOSS Industry Plan:** The themes and outcomes of the forum support and re-inforce the need to focus on skills shortage and workforce development within TasCOSS’s Industry Plan. The plan is a timely and important way to address the critical issues that affect the whole sector but cannot be solved by sub-sectors acting alone.

The critical strategies and actions that have been derived from the forum require the kind of industry-wide collaboration that the plan creates.

Increasing skills shortages across the community services sector have figured prominently in the early phase of the plan and its strategic focus. Its implementation will provide the mechanism for stakeholders in the sector to work together on practical approaches to skills shortages and workforce development.

Bringing together the training sector and the industry to identify training needs, agree on outcomes measures and quality control, and improve the responsiveness of training providers and training take-up by industry members will be clearly facilitated by the industry plan process.

It will also ensure longevity to the focus on workforce development, accountability to the industry, and provide processes for review and monitoring that will feed into a broader strategic framework for the industry.

**The Department of Education:** OPCET is responsible for planning, purchasing and supporting the delivery of vocational education and training services in Tasmania.

Training responses are developed to support and implement training initiatives to assist industry and small business. Funding is provided to TAFE and private RTO's to deliver traineeships in the Community Services sector. Other programs, including TasSkills and Skills Equip, enable the Government to respond to emerging skill shortages through tendered skill programs.

Industry Liaison Officers are employed to consult with peak bodies, councils, employers and employees, regional bodies; businesses, private RTO's and TAFE. They gather and provide information and advice that informs decisions about the purchase of VET services and assists in developing strategies for post-compulsory education and training.

Training Demand Profiles are a principle tool in training supply and demand analysis, used to inform the strategic direction for VET in Tasmania and the purchasing of training services from training providers.

They include:

- Specifics on skill shortages
- Workforce and labour market issues
- Demand for training from industry and drivers of training demand
- Demand for VET qualifications from the Government system.

Industry demand profiles are published on the internet<sup>6</sup> and are promoted as a planning resource to training stakeholders

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.education.tas.gov.au/vet/providers/industryadvice/training\\_demand\\_profiles](http://www.education.tas.gov.au/vet/providers/industryadvice/training_demand_profiles)

A review of the 2005 Community Services Training Demand Profile is currently underway. The updated and improved version is scheduled to be completed by September 2007.

OPCET manages and participates in the review, development and implementation of training packages in Tasmania, including the Community Services Training Package (CHC02) which is currently under review. The first draft of material is scheduled to be released to industry at the end of May. A validation focus group session will be held in Hobart on 21 June, giving interested stakeholders the opportunity to provide face to face feedback<sup>7</sup>

**Economic Development:** The Better Workplaces program will assist small to medium organisations that have limited capacity and resources to develop flexible and supportive workplaces by providing expert advice on modern human resources and industrial relations practices.

A Better Workplaces HR guide (with templates and checklists) is being developed. Information sessions on aspects of contemporary human resource management and leadership will be held once the HR guide has been developed.

The Employer of Choice Awards program builds on the highly successful Employer of Choice Conference held last year. The conference helped organisations to understand workforce demographic trends and the implications, the changing demands and aspiration of job-seekers and innovative strategies being adopted by national and Tasmanian organisation to attract and retain skilled workers.

The Employer of Choice Awards will recognise and celebrate Tasmanian workplaces that adopt modern work practices and promote a work-life balance as part of a strategy to increase productivity and attract and retain skilled workers.

Finalists in the Employer of Choice Awards will receive an Employer of Choice Awards 2007 logo for use in any recruitment, advertising and other company promotional material for a period of one year, and will be eligible to become one of three regional Employer of Choice Awards winners, to be announced at regional celebrations in late June 2007.

These awards events will be an opportunity to recognise and reward best-practice 'employers of choice', to share 'employer of choice' strategies and to encourage other businesses to adopt successful strategies.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.cshisc.com.au/load\\_page.asp?ID=189](http://www.cshisc.com.au/load_page.asp?ID=189)