

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, STAFF MORALE

1830. Mr R.F. Johnson to the Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth
- (1) Is the Minister aware that there is a problem of poor morale among members of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) who are members of the Department of Community Development (DCD) staff?
 - (2) If not, has the Minister read 'The West Australian Social Worker' August 2003 edition titled 'DCD Branch Forum: 25 March 2003'?
 - (3) Is the Minister aware that Western Australian members of the AASW who are members of the DCD have indicated that DCD is no longer responding to its statutory Child Protection responsibilities?
 - (4) Does the Minister accept the Director General's response to the issues raised by the AASW?
 - (5) I refer to the Director General's response in which she refers to 'mandated' Child Protection Worker positions and ask -
 - (a) how many 'mandated' positions of Child Protection Worker are there in the current Departmental structure;
 - (b) how many of these positions are 'occupied' by an officer permanently appointed to the particular mandated position; and
 - (c) what are the essential 'qualifications' and experience criteria for someone to occupy these positions?
 - (6) Will the Minister respond to those recommendations of the AASW where the Director General has failed to do so?
 - (7) Will the Minister clearly acknowledge that the Department's obligation and priority work is to respond 'statutory child protection' demands?
 - (8) Does the Minister support the 'professionalisation' of the department?
 - (9) Will the Minister allow 'field workers', who are professional Social Workers, to use their professional Social Work title in their job description and for their job descriptions forms to reflect their title?
 - (10) Will the Minister require the Department to indicate to its workers the quantum of child protection work that constitutes a 'full' work load?
 - (11) Will the Minister require the Department to state its expectations of other Government and funded agencies inasmuch as it expects them to assist the DCD 'field workers' respond to child protection work?
 - (12) Is the Minister aware that some staff who participated in the 'Cultural Change' workshops, referred to by the Director General, reported they would be penalised, castigated or bullied if they candidly expressed opinions about the current direction of the department?
 - (13) Does the Minister believe that the 'Cultural Change' workshops accurately assessed the 'climate' of staff in the Department?
 - (14) Will the Minister agree to the recommendation of the AASW forum that a (confidential) survey of staff be commissioned?
 - (15) Will the Minister require the Department to provide discipline specific supervision for field Social Workers who are 'in line' to non Social Work team leaders or managers?
 - (16) Is the Minister aware that in the AASW newsletter social work staff reported 'feeling under pressure not to offer a professional opinion if these opinions are contrary to the community development approach, that is, feel pressure not to recommend apprehension as that is seen as contrary to the current community development approach'?
 - (17) Will the Minister advise how she intends to inquire into whether social work staff are being 'pressured' to not offer a professional opinion if the opinion is contrary to the community development approach?
 - (18) Will the Minister take steps to assure the Department's professional social work staff and field officer staff that they must act and make recommendations to their line managers in their professional capacity consistent with the imperative to ensure the 'best interests' of the child or children for whom they have a responsibility?

- (19) Is the Minister aware that the AASW newsletter social work staff reported 'Managers feel bullied and harassed, in what is described as a culture of fear and intimidation?
- (20) Will the Minister advise what steps she intends to take to ascertain the veracity of this claim?
- (21) How many field officers are there in the DCD?
- (22) Do all 'field officers' have a statutory component in their role with respect to carrying out child welfare/child protection functions under the Child Welfare legislation?
- (23) If not, how many field officers have statutory obligations with respect to carrying out child welfare/child protection functions under Child Welfare legislation?
- (24) Which positions in the current DCD structure have the delegated authority to 'apprehend' a child as per the Child Welfare Act 1947?
- (25) How many officers in the department have the delegated authority to 'apprehend' a child as per the Child Welfare Act 1947?
- (26) What essential qualification must an officer have to enable them to be given the delegated authority to 'apprehend' a child as per the Child Welfare Act 1947?
- (27) Do team leaders have the delegated authority to apprehend or authorise the 'apprehension' of a child under the Child Welfare Act 1947?
- (28) What are the essential qualifications (as per the formal job description statement) for team leaders?
- (29) What training is provided for staff with a responsibility in their role for the child welfare/child protection functions under the Child Welfare legislation?
- (30) What number of hours training within DCD must an individual field officer participate in, before they are delegated to apply provisions of the Child Welfare legislation?
- (31) What training is provided to team leaders who carry the delegated authority to apprehend or authorise the 'apprehension' of a child under the Child Welfare Act 1947?
- (32) Are there any team leaders who have not completed the training?
- (33) Does the Minister agree with the comment in the AASW newsletter 'Forensic work in child protection requires workers to have the skills, knowledge and values provided by professional training in social work'?
- (34) Does the Minister believe the Department's training program provides non social work staff with the skills, knowledge and values to undertake 'forensic work in child protection'?
- (35) Does the Minister believe professional training in other disciplines develop the 'skills, knowledge and values' to undertake 'forensic work in child protection'?
- (36) If so, what professional groups does the Minister believe offer the appropriate 'skills, knowledge and values' to undertake 'forensic work in child protection'?
- (37) What are the essential qualification and experience criteria for team leaders (as per the formal job description statement) with line responsibility for field workers involved in 'forensic child protection' work?
- (38) Do these team leaders 'professionally supervise' Social Workers?
- (39) How many Senior Casework Supervisors were there in the DCD prior to the current restructure?
- (40) What were the essential qualification and experience criteria for the Senior Casework Supervisor positions?
- (41) How many Senior Casework Supervisor positions are in the DCD now?
- (42) How many of these positions are occupied by Senior Casework Supervisors?
- (43) How many notifications of child abuse were received in Australia in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003?
- (44) How many notifications of child abuse were received in Western Australia in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003?
- (45) How many substantiated cases of child abuse were there in Australia in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003?

- (46) How many substantiated cases of child abuse were there in Western Australia in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003?

Ms S.M. McHALE replied:

- (1) I am aware of the concerns raised by some members of the Australian Association of Social Workers.
- (2) See above. I have read the document.
- (3) Yes and neither the Director General nor the Minister accepts this statement by the AASW.
- (4) Yes.
- (5)
 - (a) Every District office is mandated to have at least one child protection worker position and Managers can decide how many more should be mandated for their District dependent on local circumstances. There are 47 child protection worker positions in the Department.
 - (b) There are 32 positions with permanent appointments.
 - (c) Field Officer (Child Protection):
Demonstrated:
 1. Experience and/or training relevant to casework and/or community development in a social service sector.
 2. Ability to apply the provisions of relevant legislation such as the Child Welfare Act 1947.
 3. Understanding of contemporary issues and challenges in the field of child protection and a commitment to community collaboration and capacity building approaches to enhancing child safety and wellbeing.
 4. Ability and preparedness to work with Aboriginal and ethnic communities in developing culturally appropriate and effective responses to child safety concerns.Senior Field Officer (Child Protection):
Demonstrated:
 1. Well developed skills, knowledge and experience in direct service provision in the area of child protection and a commitment to maintaining and enhancing these.
 2. Sound understanding of contemporary issues and challenges in the field of child protection and a commitment to community collaboration and capacity building approaches to enhancing child safety and wellbeing.
 3. Well developed casework and/or community development skills.
 4. Ability to impart skills and knowledge and to encourage the development of community oriented approaches to child protection and safety.
 5. Ability and preparedness to work with Aboriginal and ethnic communities in developing culturally appropriate and effective responses to child safety concerns.
- (6) If further clarification can be provided about what recommendations are being referred to I will seek the advice of the Director General of the Department.
- (7) Yes
- (8) The Department requires its workforce to possess a range of abilities, expertise and professional backgrounds in order to meet its broad mandate.
- (9) The job description form will not be changed and the generic title of Field Officer or Senior Field Officer will continue to be applied to this set of tasks and responsibilities. However, the Department has no objections to social workers adding this in brackets following their title.
- (10) The Director General of the Department has advised me that the Workload Management and Measurement Strategy, developed by the Department and the Community and Public Sector Union WA Branch/Civil Service Association of WA Inc, has provided a transparent method of measuring workloads for field staff. It allows the effective allocation of workload and resources; assists staff and management to manage their workload responsibilities; and enables measurement of resource requirements. The working group which has developed the strategy is continuing to clarify this for the information of field staff. The strategy is being applied in stages throughout the State.

- (11) The Department has existing protocols with key government agencies that are being expanded to include the role and responsibility of funded agencies in relation to child protection.
- (12) The ongoing culture project, initiated by the Director General, is the most comprehensive culture change exercise ever undertaken by the Department. From April to June 2003 seventeen workshops were held across the State as the first stage of this long term project to identify work place culture within the Department. The Director General has advised me that before the workshops commenced every staff member was informed in writing that:
- attendance at the workshops was voluntary
- they were the start of a long term investment in examining both the positives and negatives of the Department's culture
- participants would "identify some key themes, some of which will be positive and some negative."
- At the commencement of every workshop the independent facilitator explained to participants that the written outcomes of the workshops would not be seen by management of the Department. He explained that management would receive only collated and unidentifiable feedback on the outcomes.
- (13) Yes. They reflected the views of over 600 staff from a broad cross-section of the Department across a range of issues. Both positive and negative views were openly expressed.
- (14) Yes. A confidential web-based survey will be an ongoing feature of the cultural change process. All the Department's staff were advised in March 2003 that the themes identified in the workshops would form the basis of questions to be used in a survey to measure if the culture has changed.
- (15) No. If this is an issue for individual social workers they should discuss it with their line manager in the first instance.
- (16) Yes.
- (17) The best interests of children, including their safety and protection from harm, is paramount in all the Department's dealings with families, children and communities. The community development approach is not at odds with the primacy of this principle.
- (18) This is required in the Department's policies and practices and enshrined in the proposed new legislation being developed for the Department. All staff in the Department are aware of their requirements in relation to compliance.
- (19) Some social workers from the Department reported this.
- (20) This issue was canvassed in the culture change workshops. The themes identified in the workshops will form the basis of questions to be used in a survey which will assess the health and wellbeing of staff in the organisation and measure progress made in addressing concerns raised by staff about the organisational culture within the Department. The workshops also discussed the issue of communication within the organisation and staff were asked to provide input and suggestions as to strategies that could be introduced into the organisation to improve communication.
- (21) There are 378 workers in the field who can undertake case work with families and children. This includes Field Officers, Senior Field Officers and Senior Social Workers and Psychologists in the Psychological Assessment and Treatment Team. This does not include Team Leaders. It also does not include other staff who support case work in the field, such as Community Development Workers, Education Officers, Community Development and Funding Officers and Children's Services Officers.
- (22) No. Senior Social Workers and Psychologists in the Psychological Assessment and Treatment Team do not have a statutory component in their role, which means the power under the Child Welfare Act 1947 to apprehend children.
- (23) 357 field officers have the statutory responsibility under the Child Welfare Act 1947 to apprehend children.
- (24) All Field Officers, Senior Field Officers, Child Protection Workers and line management in the Community Development and Statewide Services directorate through to the Director General.
- (25) 431 officers (this includes the 25 newly created Child Protection Workers, Managers and Directors.)
- (26) No essential tertiary qualifications are required however officers must satisfy the essential criteria relevant to their position title (see Answers to Questions 5, 37 and 40).
- (27) Yes.

- (28) The essential qualifications and experience for Team Leaders are:
- Advanced supervision, management, leadership skills and experience in working in a multi-disciplinary team setting.
 - Significant practice experience in the provision of services in the community services sector.
 - Advanced skills and an understanding of contemporary casework and/or community development practice models and methods and their application in working with children, families and communities.
 - Awareness and understanding of equity and access issues and a commitment to addressing these in departmental practice.
 - Ability to convene and chair planning forums.
 - Sound knowledge and understanding of individual, family and community functioning.
 - Ability to manage the implementation of projects.
 - Ability to use management information systems.
 - Possession of a current suitable motor driver's licence (for country positions).
- (29) Foundation Case Practice training (10 days)
Core Child Protection training (3 days)
Joint Police/DCD approach to child abuse training (5 days)
Risk Assessment and Risk Management (2 days)
Interviewing Children (2 days)
Continuous on-the-job training.
- (30) All field staff are required to undertake Foundation Case Practice training as soon as possible after they commence work in the Department (see answer to Question 29).
- (31) Team Leaders are more experienced staff (see answer to Question 37) and they are able to access specific team leader training. The training that is provided is particular to the circumstances of the individual.
- (32) No. Current team leaders underwent training this year (2003). This will be followed up with additional training in November this year.
- (33) I agree that specific skills, knowledge and values are required in child forensic protection work, however I believe that professional training in social work is only one source of these competencies.
- (34) Yes. Training includes ongoing supervision.
- (35) See answer to Question 33.
- (36) See answer to Question 33.
- (37) Demonstrated:
1. Advanced supervision, management, leadership skills and experience in working in multi-disciplinary team setting.
 2. Significant practice experience in the provision of services in the community services sector.
 3. Advanced skills and an understanding of contemporary casework and/or community development practice models and methods and their application in working with children and communities.
 4. Awareness and understanding of equity and access issues and a commitment to addressing these in Departmental practice.
 5. Ability to convene and chair planning forums.
 6. Sound knowledge and understanding of individual, family and community functioning.
 7. Ability to manage the implementation of projects
 8. Ability to use management information systems
 9. Possession of a current motor vehicle driver's licence (for country positions).
- (38) See answer to Question 15.

- (39) Twenty (20). These positions were abolished and used to create 20 Team Leader positions. The staff were directly transferred into the newly created positions.
- (40) 1. Degree in Social Work with eligibility for full membership of AASW.
Demonstrated experience in:
2. Advanced casework practice and theory in a social environment.
3. Advanced case practice supervision and advanced skills in convening and chairing case conferences.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and experience in staff development through training, supervision and coaching.
Demonstrated knowledge of:
5. Departmental philosophy, legislation, policies and practices.
6. Current trends and issues in welfare administration and policy, including those relating to service delivery and welfare service to Aboriginal and ethnic communities.
7. Demonstrated competency in the ability to use, effectively, management systems.
8. Demonstrated commitment to the application of EEO principles and practices.
- (41) There are none as these positions were abolished in the Department's restructure.
- (42) See answer to question 41.
- (43) In 2001/2002 there were 137,938 notifications of child abuse in Australia (Source: Child Protection Australia 2001/2002 AIHW, page 13)
The national figures for 2002/2003 are not available, as they have not yet been published.
- (44) In 2001/2002 there were 2,036 notifications of child abuse in Western Australia. (Source: Departmental 2001/2002 Annual Report)
In 2002/2003 there were 2,247 notifications of child abuse in Western Australia. (Source: Unpublished Departmental 2002/2003 Annual Report)
- (45) In 2001/2002 there were 30,473 substantiated cases of child abuse in Australia (Source: Child Protection Australia 2001/2002 AIHW, page 14)
The national figures for 2002/2003 are not available, as they have not yet been published.
- (46) In 2001/2002 there were 1,062 substantiated cases of child abuse in Western Australia (Source: Departmental 2001/2002 Annual Report, page 52)
In 2002/2003 there were 796 substantiated cases of child abuse in Western Australia (Source: Unpublished Departmental 2002/2003 Annual Report data, page 64)