

Victorian Disability NGO Workforce Analysis Project

VICRAID, ACROD and CIDA

Research Team

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Part 1 – Overview

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objectives of the VICRAID, ACROD and CIDA NGO Workforce Analysis and Development Project were to:

- Identify the characteristics of the Disability NGO workforce within Victoria.
- Identify issues in relation to recruiting, managing, retaining and developing a suitable workforce to meet NGO client and agency need
- Provide data, analysis, issues identification and advice to NGOs, DHS and key stakeholders to inform the development of a skilled, stable workforce capable of providing high quality services to people with disabilities
- Ensure where relevant that this work is broadly comparable with similar work completed within the government sector in order to enhance the overall workforce development and client service capacity of the broad sector; and to
- Provide recommendations to guide workforce planning.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed from both employers and their staff through two surveys, as well as focus groups and interviews held in each region of the state between May and September 2002. Further detail of the methodology is provided in that section of this report. A summary of findings and recommendations is set out below. Approximately 45% of funded agencies (representing 61% of funding provided to the sector) returned employer surveys providing data about their workforce. 1475 individual members (approximately 17%) of the workforce completed individual questionnaires. In addition, more than forty agencies participated in focus groups or worksite visits and interviews. Because of the spread of agencies across service types and geographic location, and the fact that the larger employers were more likely to complete the survey than smaller ones, the researchers are confident that the data can be used to make conclusions and recommendations about the sector as a whole. The profile of staff completing the individual staff survey is similar to that of the overall staffing profile of the sector, with the exception that the researchers received a significantly lower response rate from casual staff than expected from their participation in the overall workforce.

Characteristics of the workforce

Numbers of staff and mode of employment

In July 2002, there were 5799 people employed by the 164 agencies that returned surveys. Extrapolating from this figure using data provided by DHS, it is reasonable to argue that there are approximately 8650 people working in the non-government Disability services sector in Victoria. The majority work in either day programs or shared supported accommodation. Approximately 26% of employees are full time (about 2340), 47% part time (about 4230) and 27% casual (about 2430). The largest numbers of full time staff are in day programs, while the largest numbers of part time and casual staff can be found in accommodation services and in home support services.

The lack of a consistent benchmark to distinguish between 'part time' and 'casual' means that there may be considerable overlap between these categories.

Gender and age

75% of the workforce is female and this 3:1 ratio of women to men is fairly consistent across all service types. Of the 1475 staff who completed the survey 22% of women are over the age of 45, while 41% of men are in this age group. There is however a four to one ratio of women to men in the under 30 age group suggesting that as time goes on the imbalance between numbers of men and women in the workforce will become even more accentuated. Alternatively the work may be more attractive to more mature men. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics women make up 77% of the community services workforce nationally so the figures for this workforce are similar to that found elsewhere in the industry.

Educational background and achievement

Almost 15% of staff have a pass at Year 10, or less, at secondary school as their highest qualification. 65% of the workforce have completed some post school qualification, 16% have partially completed some post school qualification while 19% have no post school qualification. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, approximately 46% of people working in the community services field have no post school qualifications. Many of the qualifications achieved are in an area related to disability but individual workers also have a range of other qualifications.

Industrial awards and agreements

The Residential Support Services Award covers the largest numbers of individuals of any of the industrial instruments surveyed. It covers 36% of the staff employed in participating agencies. 37% of staff in the sector are not directly covered by any industrial award, but rather by an enterprise agreement or an individual contract. Some of these enterprise agreements make reference to industrial awards and therefore any change in that award would have flow on effects in that agency.

Recruiting, managing, retaining and developing staff

Recruitment

Recruitment was seen to be an extremely time-consuming, and therefore costly, process – particularly for smaller agencies without dedicated human resource practitioners. It was also seen as problematic because of the difficulties in recruiting quality candidates. The low wages in the sector, the lack of parity of remuneration with other people doing similar work in government, or even less skilled work in other employment contexts, were consistently cited as major problems. Many agencies preferred to fill full time positions from their existing pool of part time or casual staff. No quantitative data was produced in relation to this but it would seem that this practice may mean that qualified people working in full time positions in other agencies or outside the sector would find it difficult to take up new positions. As men are more likely than women to hold full time positions this may also be one of the factors influencing the gender ratio in the workforce.

Retention

The project looked at retention within the sector and length of service with current employer. Approximately one third of the survey group have been working in the sector for more than ten years, with 9% of them involved for more than twenty years. Almost 20% have been working in the field for less than two years.

20% of employees have been with their current employer for twelve months or less, 37% have less than two years service with their employer. Shared supported accommodation, respite and day programs all have high percentages of long serving employees.

30% of respondents to the staff survey believed they would still be working with the same agency in two years time. Approximately 10% of full time staff left their employer in the last twelve months, with 9% of part time employees and 7% of casuals also leaving. About one third of staff leaving, left the Disability sector altogether. Although this appears to be a relatively low level of turnover, particularly by casuals, there was general acceptance that figures in relation to casuals could be highly inaccurate as most agencies kept casual 'lists' and may be unaware when someone is no longer available. The fact that 20% have been working in the field for less than 2 years may indicate a high level of 'churn' or turnover occurring predominantly among inexperienced staff. This could indicate a mismatch between their perception of the job and its reality, but further work would need to be undertaken to clarify this point.

Passion, dedication, a 'calling' and feeling of making a difference in peoples lives were the common reasons given by staff for working in the sector. Many individuals stated that working for a relatively small agency had significant advantages compared with a large one (or DHS) in that they could identify decision makers, get things done quickly and felt more empowered within their own work environment.

Poor wages, high stress, high expectation levels, the lack of recognition of some qualifications, and the inability to put together sufficient part time hours to make a viable income, were cited as the main reasons individuals were leaving the sector. Funding arrangements, which meant it was difficult to offer good staff long-term contracts, were also cited by agencies as key factors for staff leaving. The need for staff to use their own vehicles to travel to clients' residences in the case of the increasing number of in home support services, hours, shifts, and lack of guarantee of regular work for casuals were other issues mentioned in relation to the reasons why people may leave the sector.

The nature of the work itself, the lack of a career structure and the absence of any compensation or benefit for working with more demanding or challenging clients, the lack of status and lack of training and development opportunities were those most often mentioned amongst a long list of disincentives. Most agencies were using some sort of salary packaging with many if not all of their staff, and state that the main reason for doing so is to attract and retain staff.

The largest numbers of vacancies in agencies are for community and home support and for shared accommodation services. These are predominantly part time and casual positions. Whether the vacancies are there because of the nature of part time and casual work (relatively high turnover compared with full time work) or because of the type of work itself or other factors is not know and further work would need to be undertaken to clarify this.

Managing

Many concerns were raised by individual staff about a lack of appropriate supervision, both in terms of their own ability to develop as staff and the quality of services provided to clients. Comments in focus groups and on the surveys included criticisms about staff being given a night shift alone in a house 'full of clients' after just a few hours of training or being asked to provide in home support alone to a client after only one paired visit with another worker. Many staff also mentioned the link between training and supervision stating that in the absence of formal induction training, closer supervision by an experienced worker would go some way to meeting their needs.

Development

There was very strong criticism from staff about the training offered to them by their employer. 24% of staff claimed that they did not believe they were adequately trained to perform effectively and efficiently in their current role. 32% had received no staff development or training within the previous twelve months although all employers claimed that they had spent more than their allocated training budget, by an average of 36% in the previous year. One of the issues may be an unclear definition of training with staff not including in-house training, on the job training or conferences as 'training days'. The lack

of a state wide strategic approach to staff development was keenly felt in some agencies. Agency employers state that the amount of funding received for training is insufficient to meet the needs of a diverse workforce. However if the agencies are on average spending 36% more than their allocation in this area, and yet one third of their workforce is still not receiving any training and a quarter of their workforce believe they are inadequately trained to perform their current role, it appears that either the amount is still woefully inadequate or it is being poorly spent. No analysis of how the training funds were spent by the agency was undertaken as part of this project.

Comparability of research data between DHS and the non government sector

The research methodology was referenced against a DHS workforce analysis project undertaken in 2000 to ensure final data could be compared. It was not part of the brief of this project to make comparisons between the data produced within each project. However, it should be noted that 6% of the NGO workforce or more than 400 people appear to work in both sectors. The vast majority of DHS employees work in the accommodation sector, while this is only one of the many areas of employment in the non-government sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

Recommendation 1

That a summary comparative report be developed comparing data from this project with data from the 2000 DHS workforce analysis project.

Further analysis of the existing data

Recommendation 2

That further work be undertaken to identify in greater depth the different characteristics of the workforce. The work should utilise the existing data set for further analysis. Specifically analysis should focus on:

- qualifications and age
- qualifications and service type
- qualifications and length of service in the field.

Analysis of these three factors would lead to an understanding about whether 'newer' or 'younger' workers were more or less qualified than others and the relative importance of this in different service types.

Recommendation 3

That further work be done to identify in greater depth the issues facing part time and casual staff.

Collection and analysis of new data

Recommendation 4

That further work be undertaken to analyse the discrepancy between reported budgets and expenditure for training and dissatisfaction with training on offer through employers and providers.

Recommendation 5

That further work be undertaken to investigate job titles and job descriptions and to investigate commonalities in competency profiles or 'model' job descriptions that could be used to assist agencies in selecting staff but also in aligning training needs to job profiles.

Recommendation 6

That further work be undertaken to understand the profile of staff delivering in-home support to clients as this is an expanding area.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Gender Imbalance

- Is a three to one ratio of women to men a problem in a service area where a majority of the clients are male? If it is an issue what strategies can be implemented to address it?

Casualisation

- Is the high proportion of casual and part time work in the sector a problem or an asset? If it is a problem what sectoral changes need to be made to change the staffing balance so that more full time positions are created? Or, can the high number of part time and casual staff positions be seen as an asset and recruitment and retention strategies devised to suit this group?

Rates of Pay

- What rate of pay would encourage more people to apply for, accept and be retained in the sector?
- Pay rates in the non-government sector are lower than the government sector for similar work. To what extent does this factor, combined with other related issues, influence turnover in the NGO sector?
- To what extent does salary packaging alleviate issues with poor pay rates?

Management, supervision and training

- What strategies provide effective supervision and training in a client centred program area, such as in home support, where individual workers often work alone?
- If employers spend 30% more than they are funded to train staff, why do a quarter of staff believe they are inadequately trained to fulfil their current role? Is there an issue about the definition and value of training by staff?
- To what extent are qualifications held by staff relevant to their work?
- To what extent does the broad range of job titles in use in the field and the wide range of services provided to clients make it difficult for new entrants to the field?

Summary

In summary, the research found that there were more people working in the sector than previously imagined (8650 rather than 7000), they are working across a wide variety of agencies, types of work and modes of employment. As employees they talk about their dedication to the work and their clients but raise many issues of dissatisfaction. Employers in the field mentioned recruitment and retention as key issues, the lack of parity of wages between NGOs and government, the plethora of different service offerings, and the challenge of providing quality services for clients across different service areas as challenges for the future. They wanted greater access to high quality just-in-time training and methods for determining quality in training and staff development providers.

BACKGROUND

Effective strategic planning and workforce development for a statewide workforce require quality data and information. In recent years the Department of Human Services, Victoria has undertaken a range of projects to profile its Disability workforce, in order to develop better arrangements for workforce development and prepare for the future. Given the size and geographic spread of the workforce this research was a significant undertaking. Despite the complexities of this, there now exists some very useful data about the government workforce and a number of innovations in the sector have resulted.

The Victorian non-government Disability sector had however very little data that can be seen to provide a sector wide profile of its workforce. The absence of this data meant that peak bodies and government officials were working from perceptions and opinions, with little hard data to back up their arguments or decision-making processes.

The DHS Disability workforce provides services mainly to clients with an intellectual disability and offers accommodation, specialist case management and client services. All these services are also provided by non-government agencies. Yet non-government agencies were known to work with a more diverse range of disabilities (physical, sensory, neurological and acquired brain-related disabilities) and provide a broader range of support and therapy services. The government and non-government workforces operate within the same legislative framework and many clients were believed to move between government and non-government services. In addition it was perceived that many staff moved between government and non-government agencies in their work lives.

The non-government disability sector in Victoria is complex. Some agencies are dedicated to working with people with one defined type of disability, others with people with a range of disabilities. Some agencies had disability as their main focus, or 'core business' whilst for others it is a small part of their work, local government and Community Health Services, for example. In addition there are many variations in funding mixes between agencies.

Peak bodies in the non-government sector were keen to have data about their workforce in order to better plan for services delivery and develop the workforce. In addition, the Auditor-General's report of Intellectual Disability Services (2000) highlighted the importance of the competence of staff; it stated that there was an urgent need to address the size, qualifications and training of the Disability services workforce.

At the commencement of this project the three peak bodies covering this workforce believed that:

- member agencies employed somewhere in excess of 7000 people across Victoria
- government workers were better paid for the same work
- there had been little workforce development in the preceding decade
- there were crisis issues in relation to recruitment, retention, induction and supervision capacities.

In order to make these transitions and prepare for the future, DHS funded this twelve-month project to profile the workforce. Many agencies and key stakeholders have assisted greatly in the course of the project. It should be said that whilst the focus has been on the workforce the key objective has been to ensure that clients of agencies providing these services receive the highest possible quality of service.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Prior to commencing data collection efforts were made to gather support for the project in a range of ways:

- peak agencies informed their members about the project to engender support
- committee members advised people at available opportunities in meetings
- articles appeared in newsletters
- a double-sided flyer promoting the project was widely circulated (mail, distribution at the CIDA conference 2002, etc.).

Quantitative Data Collection

The collection of quantitative data presented the greatest challenge, for whilst this was seen to be a critical project for the workforce as a whole, individual agencies or staff members, who we needed to provide data, did not necessarily see the relevance to their work. It was determined that two survey instruments would be developed: one for the collection of data from agencies about their staff, and one for staff to complete about themselves and their work lives. DHS provided a database of funded agencies in Victoria and their contact details.

The Employer survey

The survey was trialled with a group of employers, 13 in total. Details are given in Appendix II.

As a result of this trial a number of refinements were made to the survey instrument. In the meantime agencies had been provided with information about the forthcoming survey and its scope. The final survey was mailed by post and electronically to agencies and replies were received from 164 agencies. Details of respondent agencies is provided in the next section of this report. Interestingly, return rates increased in line with the size of the agency; presumably larger agencies had better record keeping systems and a stronger human resources infrastructure, so answering these questions presented less of a challenge. It was agreed that only one survey should be sent to any single agency. As many of the agencies have multiple sites for service delivery, pooling data about the agency may have involved considerable effort. Follow up phone calls were made and a mini survey mailed to some respondents.

The Employee survey

The Employee survey was forwarded to managers who were requested to circulate it among their staff. Paper based questionnaires were necessary, as many of these workers did not have access to technology. The survey was also on the web, and some people took the opportunity to complete it there. 1405 of people completed the survey by mail while less than 100 completed the online version.

An incentive was offered to encourage completion of the survey and the return rate was approximately 17% of the workforce.

Because there was no database of employees we were forced to rely on employers to forward the survey to their staff. Individual staff responses are therefore likely to be from agencies which completed the employer survey.

Qualitative Data

Focus groups and interviews were conducted across the state. These were designed to capture information not readily covered by the surveys. More details of the methodology for this are provided Part 3 of the report.

Areas investigated by the project

Set out below is a table related to the key areas investigated in the project. How the data was collected is indicated as well as any relevant issues in relation to the data.

Table 1: Areas investigated by the project

Data area	Employer Survey	Staff Survey	Focus groups and interviews	Issues with the data
Total number of staff	✓			The total number was calculated by adding the returns from all employer surveys and then extrapolated to estimate the numbers in those that did not return surveys utilising budget data provided by DHS to help estimate size. All other data below is based on utilising the returned surveys and hence refers to that data set.
Number X service type	✓			Many staff work across service types so numbers do not add up to total staff. Service types were listed as per funding categories.
Award/other industrial instrument X number of staff X service type	✓			As above
Employment status X service type	✓	✓		As above
Demographic details eg. age, gender X service type	✓	✓		As above
Length of time with current employer X service type		✓		It appears some staff have interpreted the funded service categories broadly.
Length of time in the field X service type		✓		As above
Unfilled vacancies X service type X geographic location	✓			Geographic location is difficult to define. This can be done by postcode of employer head office but does not necessarily provide an indication of where vacancies are highest.
Staff turnover over past 12 months X service type X geographic location	✓			Geographic location is difficult to define. This can be done by postcode of employer head office but does not necessarily provide an indication of variations in turnover by area.
Number of staff that also work for other agencies DHS X service type		✓		
Qualifications held by existing staff		✓		Part completed qualifications are also analysed and included.

Continued table 1: Areas investigated by the project

Data area	Employer Survey	Staff Survey	Focus group	Issues with the data
Highest educational level achieved at school		✓		Some who left school earlier later went on to achieve post school qualifications.
Intended career path of existing staff		✓	✓	
Reasons for working in the sector		✓	✓	
Reasons for leaving the sector				The methodology did not address those no longer working in the sector as it surveyed only those currently working, but some information was learned from focus groups and interviews.
Barriers to staff satisfaction		✓	✓	
Barriers to quality service provision	✓	✓	✓	
Induction issues		✓	✓	
Satisfaction with available training	✓	✓	✓	
Supervision issues			✓	
Issues for agencies in recruiting staff	✓		✓	
Retention issues	✓	✓	✓	
Staff to client ratio			✓	This was a difficult area to define.
Manager/supervisor ratios			✓	This was a difficult area to define.