

Community & Public Sector Union (SPSFT)

The union for public sector workers.

CPSU (State Public Services Federation Tasmania) Inc. | CPSU (SPSF Group, Tasmanian Branch)

Commission of Inquiry
GPO Box 229
Hobart Tas 7001

By email: contact@commissionofinquiry.tas.gov.au

Dear Commissioners,

The CPSU (SPSFT) writes regarding the *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's responses to child sexual abuse in institutional settings*.

As the Union who represents Child Safety Officers and has long pushed for greater resourcing, we believe it is fundamental for the *Commission of Inquiry* to understand the perspective of workers within the system.

From the discussions the CPSU has had with workers, many of the historical issues continue to occur today.

Below are some responses by current Child Safety Service workers, in response to a question about what they would like the *Commission of Inquiry* to know about their work.

We think it is important to note that many of these comments were only provided under the protection of anonymity, CPSU holds a growing concern that there is an increasing fear among workers about raising concerns. That to do so is often misinterpreted as opposition to the redesign and recent reforms rather than concerns about the underlying underfunding of the service and the inability to meet demand.

There are insufficient workers to cope with the volume of work. High stress job results in high turnover resulting in less experienced staff. ARL is not resourced adequately to do effective early intervention work with families.

More resourcing needs to be put into freeing up the time for Child Safety Officers and Practice Leaders to do the work with children and families. None of the redesign has enabled safety or good practice with children and families. No more spending on NGO service. Time to invest in Child Safety Service, you have a committed and skilled workforce.

Child safety Officers do not get paid appropriate rates for the complex nature of the work they do. Workers have high caseload numbers, inadequate clinical supervision and lack support in managing the work. Inexperienced practitioners working with the most vulnerable people in our community is a recipe

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for disaster! More needs to be done to adequately train & support the staff so that children can be kept safe & nurtured.

There are not enough workers on the ground to carry out CP work. Out of home care workers in the south have had continuous, excessive caseloads for years. This means that carer households miss out on frequent visits, checks and training. New CSO's are not well trained before receiving a caseload. Practice leaders are not supposed to carry a case load - but do! It is there name against a case which is flagged on the IMS 'not actively case managed. Dangerous!!!! Just to name a few points.....

That it's time for the government to stop making excuses and put some serious investment into the Child Safety Service. It shouldn't be either NGO supports or Child Safety funding, it should be both.

We've had enough reviews, reforms, realignments and redesigns. It's time for them to show some respect by investing in recruitment, retention, resourcing and remuneration for Child Safety.

There are very few CSOs that I have worked with over 13 years who have not been committed totally to their children and prepared to go above and beyond duty to ensure they are safe and cared for. The biggest frustration is the lack of resources, mainly actual workers, so we all have the time to do our jobs properly. There is also a lack resources in the community such as AHPs, family support workers, you name it, every support you can think of. I am also pretty appalled to see Andrea Sturges speaking of problems with CSS without mentioning that she was our director for over four years and was responsible for overriding our guidelines on many occasions. In her current role she has oversight of the only program the state funds to help children in care develop independence skills in their own unit. She is not adverse to kicking vulnerable young people out of this program and therefore their home when it suits her. One of those she kicked out has just been awarded a Tasmanian Young Achievers Award. No thanks to Andrea for that. Vent over.

I'd like the commission to be aware of the considerable practice changes in CSS over the last few years. That we have 165 children without an allocated worker and soon that will hit close to 200 with another 2 workers leaving. It is not the 50 odd that is reported. Figures are wrong as it looks only at teams 4 through to 9. It doesn't include team 10 in any statistics and they look after over 150 children. It doesn't include the almost 70 children that can't be moved from assessment teams 1 though 3 that are waiting to move to case management. There are children hidden under practice leaders and practice managers that are hidden. There is an atmosphere of appointing Practice Leaders and Practice Managers from untested and inexperienced staff because there is nobody else. We can't keep staff because it is the lowest paid in any state let alone compare to NGOs in Tasmania. A recent employee quit and moved to and NGO for \$30,000 more than they currently get to be over worked and unappreciated by the community. The system is failing because the expectation of level of intensive work required for each family means a CSO should

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have no more than 6-8 children for newer staff and no more than 10 children for experienced staff. 15+ is not realistic when they want us to do everything.

Our partners do not work collaboratively with us. Education and Police blame us and lay everything at our feet to solve. We gets statements like just feed and bed the child and everything will be ok. You're the guardian stop them from offending. These statements don't help.

The RHH pressure us to take orders because children are homeless. CAMHS reject 99% of our referrals by saying it's trauma and we don't work with that. We have too few psychologist who understand childhood trauma in our state and we fight to be able to find it even if we find one.

We have no placements for children and to get a special care package is almost impossible as the state literally can't afford them. Carers are not reimbursed adequately for what children cost to raise.

Community expectations are unrealistic as we don't have staff, can't keep the ones we have and everyone out there is an expert.

The TAC presentation to the commission was a joke....noting I agree that aboriginal communities should run CSS for their own children but there eligibility of who is aboriginal is different. Hence they wipe their hands and walk away from at least half our aboriginal children. The other half they say they don't have placements or workers - or say no we can't be involved because we are part of the community and it's too awkward?

The NGO that have appeared for homelessness don't mention that they routinely black ban' children and YP in OoHC without explanation. We literally can't access shelters yet they are partly funded to house our kids. We have security on site every day and we are threatened and harassed in our work place daily. Death threats are common.

So all that aside - why do we do this? Because we believe that the community can come together and we can make safety happen. We believe the families hold the answers not us and we can help guide them to keep their own children safe with the help of all service working together and not passing the buck. We believe extended families and friends need to step up and be the network families need.

What would we like? The community, our partners, Education, Police, CAMHS, the RHH to acknowledge we are professionals and experts in our field by being respectful of us.

We are so desperately under staffed. We have over 100 children we have parental responsibility for who don't have an allocated worker. Without workers to know and support these children there is no one to hear their voices and action what they need. I can't believe the \$ figures being discussed for the AFL stadium and what has already been spent on the basketball, compared to what was spent for CSS for a complete reform. But I guess abused children are not something people want to talk about at weekend BBQs so no votes in putting money into our service.

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We keep coming to work every day because we want the best for the kids but our own system works against us. We aren't supported, we aren't resourced, and we don't have the processes we need to do good jobs. We are abused for the work we do, by other services as much as by clients, but we are powerless to improve the system. We aren't heard or listened to either.

As a Union, we encourage the *Commission of Inquiry* to encourage current Child Safety Service workers to speak privately to the inquiry.

This year, CPSU members at Child Safety Services will bargain for improvements to their wages and conditions.

In this, Child Safety Service workers have flagged the need to create trauma safe workplaces; improved debriefing and leave after major incidences, better mental health support along with demand based funding and staff ratios in Child Safety Services. Ratios, like what exist in Hospitals and Child Care Centre's who ensure that when demand - the number of calls/notifications to the Advice and Referral Line, the number of kids on care and protection orders and in out of home care increase the number of case workers automatically increase.

We are also encouraging the Department to review the existing salary and working arrangements to ensure Child Safety is best placed to attract and retain staff. Without the above Child Safety and the Advice and Referral Line will continue to struggle with recruitment and retention of workers, only exacerbating the existing staffing issues and inability to meet demand putting vulnerable children and increased likelihood of harm.

The CPSU is available to discuss in further detail the issues and experiences this group of workers are challenged with every day.

Regards,



Thirza White
Secretary
CPSU (SPSFT) Inc. and CPSU (SPSF Group, Tasmanian Branch)

15 July 2022