

Labour dynamics and the non-government community services workforce in NSW

Natasha Cortis, Fiona Hilferty, Sharni Chan and Kathy Tannous

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Contents

Executive Summary	v
1 Introduction	1
1.1 The challenge of workforce development in community services.....	1
1.2 The need for research about the non-government community services workforce	2
1.3 The importance of the NGO community services workforce	3
The context of partnership	4
Workforce capacity: a shared priority.....	5
1.4 Aims and approach of this study.....	6
2 Literature review	8
2.1 Evidence from previous research.....	8
2.2 Workforce issues in community service industries.....	12
Child and family services.....	12
Disability services.....	14
Alcohol and other drug (AOD) services	15
Mental health services.....	17
Housing and homelessness services.....	18
2.3 Workforce strategies	19
3 Data review.....	24
3.1 Evidence from the 2006 Census	25
4 Survey of community service labour dynamics	29
4.1 Methodology and design.....	29
Issues covered.....	29
Sampling and survey distribution.....	30
Limitations	31
4.2 Survey findings	32
Respondents' demographic characteristics	32
Characteristics of respondents' main job	35
Working conditions.....	39
Education and professional development.....	44
Career history and intentions	46
Conclusions.....	49
5 Focus groups with workers.....	51
5.1 Methodology and design.....	51
5.2 Community Service Workers.....	53
A shared commitment to helping clients.....	53
Qualifications and training.....	57
5.3 Workforce challenges: factors that threaten the motivation and commitment of workers	58
Funding policy and programs	58
Pay	59
Care penalties.....	60
Career path.....	62
Job Insecurity	63
5.4 Workers' suggestions for reform	63
Policy level strategies.....	63
Sectoral level strategies.....	65
5.5 Conclusions.....	66
6 Stakeholder interviews.....	67
6.1 Methodology and design.....	67
6.2 Findings	67
Perceptions of the NGO workforce.....	67
Perceptions of 'good' workers	68

What attracts workers to NGOs?.....	70
6.3 Workforce challenges	72
Recruitment and retention	72
Career paths and working conditions	74
Funding arrangements.....	76
6.4 Perspectives on workforce strategies	78
7 Towards strategies that promote capacity and sustainability	80
Co-operation, co-ordination and leadership	80
Improving recruitment, retention, recognition and reward	81
Professionalisation, qualifications and training	81
The importance of funding.....	82
Researching the NGO community services workforce	83
8 Conclusions	84
9 Reference list.....	90
Appendix A.....	88
Appendix B.....	89
Attachment A: Survey Instrument.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

List of Tables

Table 1 Workers employed in community service occupations by government and non-government organisations and industry, NSW 2006.....	27
Table 2 Workers employed in private (non-government) organisations in community services industries by ANZSCO and gender, NSW 2006.....	27
Table 3 NGO community service workers in NSW by Geographical location and Gender, 2006.....	28
Table 4 Community service workers in private sector in NSW by age, 2006.....	28
Table 5 Survey distribution to DoCS funded services.....	31
Table 6 Gender by job type*.....	33
Table 7 The age profile of the NGO sample.....	33
Table 8 Union membership by service type	35
Table 9 Union membership by age	35
Table 10 Respondents by service type.....	36
Table 11 Respondents by organisation and workplace size.....	36
Table 12 Proportion of time spent in frontline provision by job type	38
Table 13 Proportion of time spent in frontline provision by gender.....	39
Table 14 Use of leave, NGO workers and HILDA sample	39
Table 15 Access to flexible and family friendly working arrangements.....	40
Table 16 Types of items reportedly salary sacrificed	41
Table 17 Satisfaction with current pay, job security and the work itself.....	41
Table 18 Satisfaction with current hours, flexibility and overall job satisfaction	42
Table 19 Respondents satisfaction with key dimensions of their jobs*	43
Table 20 Indicators of work strain, security and complexity.....	44
Table 21 Purpose of last supervisory meeting by level of frontline provision, top 5 issues	46
Table 22 Perceptions of opportunities in NGO and government organisations	48
Table 23 Focus group summary information.....	52

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographical Classification
ASU	Australian Services Union
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CDSMC	Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council
CSGP	Community Services Grants Program
DADHC	Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (NSW)
DoCS	Department of Community Services (NSW)
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet (NSW)
FONGA	Forum of Non-Government Agencies
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
NCOSS	New South Wales Council of Social Services
NGO	Non-government organisation
PBI	Public Benevolent Institution
SACS	Social and Community Services
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
TAFE	Technical And Further Education

Executive Summary

Community service agencies work independently, together, and with governments and community members to build social relationships, promote access and participation, and ensure quality of life, especially for people experiencing hardship. The quality and effectiveness of these services depends on a high quality, capable, and sustainable workforce.

Around Australia, developing and sustaining the non-government sector workforce has become a shared goal of government agencies, peak bodies, unions and employers. The research contained in this report was conducted to obtain evidence which is specific to New South Wales (NSW), and can inform local strategies for building capacity and sustainability. The project was developed in response to a request from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Department of Community Services (DoCS), following the development of workforce initiatives by NSW Government Human Service CEOs and the Forum of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA) in 2008.

The exploratory study consisted of four strands: a literature and data review; the NSW non-government organisation (NGO) community services workforce survey; focus groups with workers; and stakeholder interviews. Together, the strands provide vital information about the state of the non-government sector workforce, highlighting strengths and challenges, and possible strategies for reform.

Literature and data review

Internationally, workers in the non-profit sector are reportedly highly committed, but require appropriate organisational supports to ensure they are retained. Although community services offer opportunities for satisfying working lives, Australian studies consistently report high levels of turnover. This has been explained in terms of low pay, high caseloads, poor preparation and training, and lack of organisational supports, making both the work unattractive, and workers susceptible to stress and burnout. These trends are not unique to the non-government sector, to NSW, or to Australia, but have been documented across community services and internationally.

Survey of community service labour dynamics

To explore labour dynamics and challenges in NSW, the study involved a survey of the NSW non-government sector community services workforce, which received 2,473 responses. Reflecting the gender imbalance in community services, women made up 83.2 percent of respondents, and respondents were older than the broader NSW workforce. The highest number of responses came from community based ageing and disability services, and from child, family and youth services.

As could be expected, there are high proportions of part time workers in the sample, and while there is some apparent preference for part time work, 30.3 percent of part time workers reported working part time as this was all that was offered. Correspondingly, multiple job holding also appears relatively common in the non-government community services sector.

Compared with the broader workforce, NGO respondents appear to have higher levels of access to paid annual and sick leave. Higher proportions also reported spending time on workers compensation, and did so for longer than other workers in NSW. Access to paid maternity leave reported was dramatically lower than in the broader NSW workforce: 26.2 percent compared to 51.9 percent, which may raise challenges for retaining female workers throughout their childbearing years.

In terms of job satisfaction, respondents report being less satisfied with their pay and job security than other workers in NSW (represented by Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)). However, there appears no difference in levels of satisfaction with the work itself, with the hours worked, and with the flexibility of the work. These NGO community service workers also felt their jobs were more stressful, complex and time pressured than did other workers in NSW, but were also more likely to feel they were interesting.

While satisfaction with pay was lower than in the broader workforce, salary packaging does appear to provide some assistance in raising levels of remuneration. Of those who answered the question, 82.1 percent indicated they did have access to salary packaging in their workplace, with the most commonly sacrificed items being 'big ticket' expenses such as mortgage payments or rent, credit cards, superannuation and motor vehicles. Importantly, even where respondents' employers offered opportunities to salary sacrifice, 13.6 percent reported that they did not use it. The value of salary sacrificing options, the spread of opportunities across the sector, and the reasons for non-use, are issues for further research.

Higher proportions of NGO workers reported studying (26.0 percent) compared with 16.4 percent of employees in HILDA, and survey respondents appear more highly qualified, with 61.1 percent having a university degree, with the highest proportions of university educated workers found in peak bodies, cultural services, and community based health. Just under one in ten workers had no qualification. In terms of supports for professional development, the sample of NGO workers reported higher levels of conference and seminar attendance, and employer funded training, than other workers in NSW.

In terms of career histories, the most notable dynamic is movement within the NGO sector itself. Fifty-five percent of respondents had come to their current job from a previous job in community services. Of this group, more than half came to their job from another NGO, and a fifth moved to their position from another job in the same NGO. Movement of workers from government organizations to the NGO sector is more limited but still substantial, with 18 percent reporting entering their current job from a local, state or federal government role in community services.

In terms of career intentions, NGO workers were more likely than other workers in NSW to feel they would lose their job in the next year, and almost a third of workers had looked for a job in the last four weeks (compared to only 14.3 percent of workers in the wider NSW workforce). Larger proportions reported looking for work in a local, state or federal government organisation (44.4 percent) than in the NGO sector (30.8 percent). While only 29.2 percent of respondents intend to remain with their current organisation in five years, a higher proportion intends to remain in a NGO (40.8 percent).

These career intentions are shaped by perceptions of different employment opportunities in different organisations. Although respondents felt NGOs offered the best opportunities to make a difference, achieve outcomes for clients, build relationships with clients and with staff in other agencies, and exercise judgment, government organisations were perceived to provide better conditions of employment in the way of pay, job security, career paths and professional development. These factors act as powerful incentives for workers to move out of the NGO sector, as confirmed in the focus groups and stakeholder interviews.

Focus groups with workers

Seven focus group interviews were conducted involving 45 participants. Six groups were with non-government community service workers, while one was with TAFE students preparing to enter the workforce. Complementing the other methodologies, focus groups aimed to examine workers' subjective experiences of working in community services, their support needs, and ideas for workforce reform, with the student focus group exploring motivations and preparedness for work in community services, and perceptions of the non-government sector.

The focus groups reaffirmed that NGO community service workers are highly committed to 'making a difference' in the lives of their clients. Their commitment appears to be to helping others, and to their job, and NGOs were perceived as more accommodating of this commitment than other organisations. A strong service ethic was also evident amongst students, but these participants also lacked confidence in their ability to find a job within the sector. Focus groups indicated that there is much movement of workers between the sectors, with a common movement pattern identified: beginning work in the NGO sector, transferring to the government sector with more experience and training; and then returning to the NGO sector. Many of the older focus group participants had followed this pathway, and some of the younger participants were part way down the path and intending to move into the public sector (although it is unclear whether they would do so, and how many would return).

Focus group participants acknowledged disadvantages to working in the NGO sector – most commonly discussed was low pay and limited career paths. The survey data, however, indicate that workers were prepared to accept poorer working conditions for the intrinsic rewards, including responding to the needs of clients, and working in an environment that was relatively free from bureaucratic constraint.

The focus groups identified a range of factors that threaten the motivation and commitment of NGO community service workers. Inadequate levels of current funding; regulatory clauses in funding contracts that tied organisations to rigid service models; the shift towards quantifiable output targets in human services; and inconsistent and onerous accountability and reporting requirements were identified as key factors. Other factors that threaten workforce sustainability include low levels of pay; limited career progression within the sector; and the impermanent nature of many jobs in the NGO sector due to short term funding contracts.

Focus groups identified a range of strategies for sectoral reform, including extending funding terms, and increasing funding levels to cover workforce development initiatives. Participants also suggested developing occupational classification structures; restructuring the Social and Community Services (SACS) award; a greater

sharing of resources across government and non-government sectors (especially in relation to staff training); and creating a campaign to raise the profile and understanding of the NGO community services sector within society.

Stakeholder interviews

In addition to the survey and focus groups, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 stakeholders in the non-government community services sector. The aim was to explore how leaders in management and advocacy positions view workforce issues, the challenges they observe, and the strategies they feel are required to promote capacity and sustainability.

Interviewees highlighted the strength of the NGO sector. As shown in the literature review and focus groups, the NGO sector was perceived to offer opportunities to work in mission-driven agencies, to work closely with service users and make a difference, and to work with fewer bureaucratic constraints than in the public sector. While perspectives were mixed, interviewees in general highlighted the importance of life experience and a commitment to making a difference to workforce quality, but emphasised this as a supplement to, not substitute for, formal training and qualifications. Formal training was seen as a necessary enabler for effective practice, with Certificate Level IV TAFE qualifications seen as the minimum. While recruitment of unqualified staff was observed, such practices were interpreted as responses to poor remuneration and were largely met with disapproval.

Stakeholder interviewees identified key challenges including recruitment and retention, especially of frontline staff, with pay levels, and pay equity with the government sector, seen as the most important contributors. Other factors contributing to difficulties recruiting staff were the structure of career paths, with few opportunities for promotion at the frontline and limited opportunities in management, and the need for workers to perform extra unpaid hours. Funding arrangements were seen as important to developing capacity and sustainability, with the short term nature of funding seen to work against the establishment of quality jobs. These factors were similarly identified in the focus groups, and have been foreshadowed in previous research. Overall, interviewees agreed it is timely for governments to lead initiatives to improve workforce quality and sustainability, with sector-wide cooperation seen as integral.

Towards strategies that promote capacity and sustainability

The research highlights how strategies to promote capacity and sustainability are a shared responsibility, involving government agencies and policy makers, non-government agencies, as well as peak bodies, unions and professional associations. Collective and coordinated action is required by all stakeholders to realise comprehensive reform to policy structures and funding arrangements necessary for long term sustainability. Interview and focus group data indicates that there is much goodwill among workers and key stakeholders to co-operate with government led initiatives to address recruitment, retention and other challenges across the sector.

The research highlights the necessity of both national and state-wide workforce planning for all sectors of community services. The research confirms the need for an improvement in the working conditions and rewards for NGO community service

workers. A restructuring of the SACS award to improve remuneration and to include a classification that recognises the skills of expert practitioners would provide some way to improve workforce sustainability.

Greater professionalization of the sector by implementing strategies such as establishing minimum qualification levels and standards of practice would also offer to improve capacity. The research highlights the central role of funding arrangements to workforce management and development, and suggests changes related to the level and terms of funding contracts, as well as tendering processes. Finally, the research identifies issues and gaps in data collection systems. Improvements to these would strengthen the basis for evidence-based policy responses.

1 Introduction

Community service agencies work independently, together, and with governments and community members to build social relationships, promote access and participation, and ensure quality of life, especially for people experiencing hardship. Although community services encompass a wide range of activities in varied contexts, a distinguishing feature is that they are labour intensive. As such, their quality and effectiveness depends on a high quality, capable, well managed, and sustainable workforce.

Developing, supporting and sustaining the community services workforce is proving a persistent challenge in Australia, and in other countries. In Australia, recent research, policy and consultative documents point to a series of interlinked workforce challenges, ranging across both government and non-government areas of service provision (Healy et al, 2009; CSHISC, 2008; ACOSS, 2008; Meagher and Healy, 2005; Meagher and Healy, 2006; DEWR, 2007; VCOSS, 2007). Challenges relate to:

- *Labour dynamics*, including higher than optimal levels of turnover; shortages of qualified and specialist staff; acute recruitment and retention difficulties outside metropolitan areas; and uncoordinated pathways to entry;
- *Working conditions*, including pay which is lower than in comparable or competing industries; inter-sectoral pay inequity; high caseloads; performance of unpaid hours; emotional exhaustion and burnout; poor supports for staff development; limited career paths; unclear boundaries between professional and non-professional roles; poor supervisory and management capacity; and high incidence of workplace incidents and adverse events;
- *Worker characteristics*, including workforce ageing; over-representation of women; high proportions of part time, casual and temporary staff; shortages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) staff.

Inevitably, supporting and sustaining the community services workforce to overcome this range of challenges will be a complex endeavour, requiring both robust evidence, stakeholder commitment, and government leadership in managing workforce size and composition, and recruiting, retaining and up-skilling the workforce (NCOSS, 2007b).

1.1 The challenge of workforce development in community services

Developing the community service workforce is complex. One reason for this complexity is fragmentation within community service industries. Workers with similar skill sets are spread throughout a range of subsectors, including child, family and youth services, care and support for the aged and disabled, and housing and homelessness services, each with its own range of regulatory and funding arrangements. Further, community services work takes place in a range of organisational contexts. Workers with similar skills and goals may be employed by

Commonwealth, state and local government agencies, and by non-profit¹ and private organisations, and there may be large differences in working arrangements, conditions and pay for similar work in different categories of agency, and different individual organisations. Even within the non-profit sector, community services work is performed by a range of large, medium and small organisations, with various religious and other affiliations, and different employment models and funding structures.

1.2 The need for research about the non-government community services workforce

Effective and appropriate responses to the range of workforce challenges require robust and context-specific research evidence. Yet so far, evidence about Australia's community services workforce has been limited. With some exceptions (eg Meagher and Healy, 2005, 2006), appropriate statistical data has not been available, and academic studies have tended to focus on specific subsectors such as child and family services (see Hodgkin, 2002; Healy et al, 2009; Meagher et al, 2009; Cortis et al, 2009) or residential aged care (Martin and Richardson, 2004); or on specific occupations such as social work (see Healy and Meagher, 2007; Lonne and Cheers, 2004).

A few surveys have been conducted across parts of the community services workforce, including a large national survey conducted by the Australian Services Union (ASU, 2007a). A survey of community sector organisations is also undertaken annually by ACOSS, although this covers a limited range of workforce issues (ACOSS, 2008). A broader resource comes from Meagher and Healy's analysis of the characteristics of workers in community services occupations from the Australian Census (2005, 2006), although the focus is on those performing frontline care work only, not all community service workers, and data from the 2001 Census does not distinguish between workers in the government and non-government sectors.

Little research has been conducted about the various workforce challenges and dynamics affecting non-profit, government and for-profit agencies, and the character of these in different community sub-sectors. Research into workforce issues in the non-profit sector specifically is warranted because non-profit agencies (defined as those which are self-governing and independent, which work for the public benefit, and which do not distribute profits, see Salamon, 1999) could be expected to confront some unique challenges.

Firstly, funding models shape workforce dynamics in non-profit agencies. Where projects are funded in the short term only (usually considered three years or less), employees would be expected to have similarly short term patterns of tenure. Secondly, non-profit agencies have different models of corporate governance to other private organisations or government agencies, being accountable to boards and committees rather than owners, shareholders or parliaments. In the non-profit model, boards and committees are the formal employers of staff, contributing to much variation in the sector. Further, the formal constitution of NGOs means that many

¹ In this paper we use the terms 'non-government' or 'non-profit' interchangeably. While the terms 'voluntary', 'charitable' or 'third sector' agencies also describe these organisations, they are less commonly used in Australia.

non-profits in Australia may have status as ‘public benevolent institutions’ (PBI status), opening the gateway to a range of tax concessions. PBI status allows exemption from fringe benefit tax, which opens options for some organisations to offer staff opportunities to salary sacrifice a range of purchases and living expenses, as part of their remuneration package. However, these arrangements are not universal. Wide variations in practice indicate salary sacrificing may be an inconsistent strategy for improving reward structures for community services workers².

A further point distinguishing the non-profit workforce is the ethos and value base underpinning many non-profit organisations. These values may be interpreted to increase employees’ willingness to work for less pay than those in other organisations, because workers are seen to trade off pay to work in environments where personal values align with those of the organisation. A final feature which distinguishes the non-profit workforce is the specialist contexts in which they work, and their strength in working closely and flexibly with communities. As such, the occupational and skill-base of the workforce, and their mode of working on the ground, could be expected to differ from work in other agencies.

Recognising the uniqueness and importance of the nongovernment sector, and the diversity of community services contexts, this research explores the range of workforce issues across non-profit community services in New South Wales. The aim is to inform more systematic and context-specific workforce planning, to help improve working conditions, overcome recruitment and retention difficulties, sustain quality service delivery, and improve outcomes for clients.

1.3 The importance of the NGO community services workforce

At present, addressing workforce challenges across community services is particularly important. The sectors’ workforce matters in a relative sense, in terms of parity with other industries which compete for workers, and in an absolute sense, in terms of ensuring the sector will have the capacity to achieve its mission. This is coupled with projections of likely increases in short term demand for services associated with the global financial crisis, and longer term demand associated with an ageing population.

In the short term, the global financial crisis is likely to both increase demand for services as unemployment rises, and to reduce the amount of investment and philanthropic funds available to the non-profit sector (Allen Consulting Report, 2008:21; Access Economics, 2008; Anglicare Australia et al, 2009)³.

In the longer term, national trends toward an ageing workforce (Kryger, 2005) are likely to have particular impacts on the human services. As well as increasing demand for community services, population ageing is expected to simultaneously reduce the supply of community services workers (Allen Consulting, 2008: 19). Indeed, sustaining workforce supply is a particular challenge, as care workers tend to be older

² Tax status among NGOs varies greatly. A recent survey (ACOSS, 2008) showed that while almost half of respondents indicated that they were an Income Tax Exempt Charity (ITEC), only 13 percent reported having Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status.

³ Note however that some in the United States are calling for stimulus spending to be directed to improving direct care jobs (see Fremsted, 2009).

than workers in other industries. In itself, this can make it difficult to recruit younger people into the industry, compounding concerns about workforce sustainability when the older generation retires (Meagher & Healy 2005, p.9).

The context of partnership

While workforce challenges are evident across community services generally affecting the public, commercial and not-for-profit sectors, those in the *non-profit* sector are particularly pressing, given the flourishing of social programs built around integrated, collaborative or partnership models. Although non-profit agencies have played a role in delivering services to alleviate poverty and disadvantage since the early days of colonisation, partnerships with NGOs have become increasingly important for organising and delivering community services in recent decades. The value of government support for non-profit welfare services in Australia tripled in real terms from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s (Lyons, 1990:8). Growth continued throughout the 1990s, as debates about ‘small government’ ascribed characteristics to the non-profit sector (such as flexibility) which positioned these organisations as more appropriate for social service delivery than government bureaucracies (McDonald, 1999:11).

Subsequently, since the 1990s, models of partnership have evolved which utilise the non-profit sector’s supposed ‘comparative advantage’ in responding to social disadvantage (Billis and Glennerster, 1998). Governments in Australia and other countries have developed various relationships with NGOs to take advantage of their structurally-embedded strengths in working closely with communities and vulnerable populations – strengths which derive from their community-based ownership structure, stakeholder diversity, flexibility, and specialisation (Billis and Glennerster, 1998).

Recognising these strengths, governments extended greater service provision roles to non-profit partners. As Healy and Meagher (2004: 247) point out, where non-government or other private provision replace public sector employment, employment regulation tend to decrease and boundaries tend to blur between professional and non-professional work, and paid and unpaid roles. Developments in the 1990s have also had implications for pre-existing partnerships between governments and non-profits, with public agencies replacing funding for inputs with ‘strings attached’ output and outcome based contracts (Melville, 1998). While these arrangements are supposed to enhance productivity, offer cost reductions to purchasers, and enable governments to hive off risk, the development of competitive tendering for services is argued to have reduced independence, diverted goals, reduced capacity to collaborate, and placed pressure on agencies to cut costs and quality (McDonald, 2002). These developments place pressure on the budgets of NGOs, including their staffing budgets.

Indeed, because of the labour intensive, people-oriented nature of community services work, productivity gains are seen as difficult to achieve without placing pressure on staffing budgets (Allen Consulting, 2008). The need to compete to win contracts compounds the risk that some organisations will reduce wages and conditions, recruit staff with lower (more affordable) qualifications, and minimise training and development opportunities (AASW, 2009: 12). Ultimately, this risks undermining service quality, capacity and productivity, in favour of crude cost efficiencies, with

likely costs for governments and the broader social fabric, as well as workers themselves.

Workforce capacity: a shared priority

Government agencies and non-profits are currently mutually dependent, but over the next decade, these partnerships are likely to become even more important, both nationally and in NSW. Nationally, the Federal Housing and Community Services Department has supported non-government agencies in the child and family welfare field for a number of years (under, for example the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy), and in March 2009, announced a further shift of \$7 billion for social housing from state and territory housing authorities to non-profit providers (Plibersek, 2009). In NSW, the trend is also toward greater engagement with the non-government sector, with the report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services (Wood, 2008) recommending transferring more child welfare functions from the public to the non-government sector. While these developments have been largely welcomed by key players in the sector, some have raised concerns about sector capacity and sustainability, namely, whether NGO funding, infrastructure and staffing will be sufficient in the context of an expanded range of functions (AASW, 2009).

As such, building workforce capacity is a growing concern on the public agenda, and is shared by different levels of government, as well as non-government agencies, peak bodies, unions and professional bodies. Effective action requires cooperation to improve the coordination of the increasing number of initiatives. At a Ministerial level, workforce planning was an agreed priority at the 2008 and 2009 meetings of the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council (CDSMC), and has also been prioritised in the National Disability Agreement. Developments involve the formation of an industry reference group to develop workforce strategies in the disability field, in particular, to resolve issues around training, qualifications, career pathways and retention, and to plan for the next two decades (CDSMC 2008, 2009).

Another CSDMC initiative has been to commission research to establish a picture of the Community Services workforce across Australia. Covering disability services, child protection, juvenile justice, and 'general community services' (including family support services, and excepting other childcare and aged care), a commissioned study being conducted through 2009 by the National Institute for Labour Studies, will provide a national and representative picture of the community services workforce.

Also at a national level, consultations exploring scope to develop a compact between the Australian government and the NGO sector identified the need to develop workforce capacity and improve staff retention, including addressing wage parity, and professional development opportunities and career paths (ACOSS, 2008). Following research highlighting low wages and associated challenges in attracting and retaining staff, the Australian Services Union has developed a set of recommendations and a national plan to address the workforce crisis in the social and community services industry (ASU 2007a; 2007b, 2009). This includes an innovative strategy for developing career and wage structures, education pathways, funding arrangements and accreditation, certification and registration, which has been well received by employers as well as workers (ASU, 2009). Large employers have however called for governments to take greater leadership in developing a national workforce strategy to

address issues of recruitment, training, retention and remuneration across the social services sector (Anglicare Australia et al, 2009).

At the State level, progress has been achieved through the Queensland Industrial Commission, with a wage rise recently awarded to social and community services (SACS) workers on the basis of pay equity with public sector workers (Commissioner Fisher, 2009). In NSW, the NCOSS Sector Development Strategy for 2007-2010 identifies the need for a state-wide workforce development strategy, including professional development opportunities for boards and managers, and has developed an options paper setting out various models of workforce development (NCOSS, 2007a; 2007b). At their annual implementation meeting in August 2008, NSW Government Human Service CEOs and representatives of FONGA (Forum of Non-government Agencies) discussed strategies to improve workforce capacity building in the non-government sector, and established scholarships to support the development of NGO leadership capacity, and a leadership program for Indigenous women in community services, as well as this research.

In the context of child protection, the Wood report (Wood, 2008) recently recommended that workforce strategies take account of the needs of NGOs as more functions are transferred from the public sector. This report highlighted the need to ensure NGOs are sufficiently funded so that they have the infrastructure to attract and retain experienced staff. In response, a Child Protection Advisory Group, chaired by the Minister, has been established to address policy and implementation issues arising. This group includes workforce issues as a priority (CPAG, 2009). Indeed, stakeholders have identified recruitment and retention of skilled workers as an impediment to the development of child protection systems in NSW. The Australian Association of Social Workers, for example, welcomed the priority Wood placed on developing partnerships with the non-government sector, but expressed concern about workforce issues, especially pay parity with government, and working conditions (AASW, 2009).

1.4 Aims and approach of this study

In the context of the issues outlined above, this report outlines findings from an exploratory study of labour dynamics and the non-government sector workforce in NSW. The project was developed in response to a request from the DPC and the DoCS, following the development of workforce initiatives by NSW Government Human Service CEOs and FONGA in 2008. Recognising the limited evidence about the community service workforce and its dynamics, the project aims were to explore labour dynamics in the non-government community services sector, along with workforce characteristics in the sector; workers' perceptions, experiences, and career intentions; workforce challenges and the factors that affect them; and possible strategies for reform.

Although the term 'non-government' encompasses both organisations operating in non-profit and commercial capacities, the report focuses on non-profit agencies. While the large numbers of staff who work directly with clients at the service delivery interface are of critical importance, the study is concerned with capacity of non-profit organisations and the non-profit sector overall. As such, as well as those who work directly with clients, the study is also concerned with the managers and leaders who make up the workforce, as well as the range of administrative and other workers

employed by non-profit agencies. Although volunteers also contribute in important ways to workforce capacity, they are not a specific focus of the report.

The project was designed to include a literature and data review (reported in Section 2 and 3), a survey of labour dynamics in NSW's non-profit community services (reported in Section 4), focus groups with NGO workers (reported in Section 5), and key stakeholder interviews (reported in Section 6). In early discussions, it was agreed that the research would focus on the subsectors of child, family and youth services; community based disability, health and ageing services; and housing and homelessness services; and would therefore exclude the institutional settings of childcare centres and residential aged care, as these could be expected to have more discrete labour markets.

Together, the findings from the NGO workforce survey, the focus groups and stakeholder interviews provide vital information about the state and characteristics of the non-government sector workforce, and how its capacity can be improved and sustained.

2 Literature review

2.1 Evidence from previous research

This section examines existing research about the non-government community services workforce. The body of literature highlights four main (and interlinked) themes: worker satisfaction and motivation; recruitment and retention; undervaluation; and workforce quality.

Worker satisfaction and motivation

Worker satisfaction and motivation emerge as key strengths of the non-profit community services workforce: staff tend to be highly committed and, if properly supported, are satisfied with their work. This trend has been found internationally, although differences in the institutional framework and service delivery context mean findings cannot be generalised universally.

Research in the United States has shown NGO workers to be more committed and satisfied than others, to have more confidence in their organisation's leadership than other workers, and to find their work more meaningful even where their workload is higher and pay is lower than in other areas (Light, 2002, 2003). Other research has found that although non-government community service workers may be less satisfied than others with the 'self-regarding' aspects of their work such as pay, they are more satisfied than others with the extrinsic, relational or 'other-regarding' aspects of their work (such as serving clients) (Borzaga and Tortia, 2006).

In terms of the factors shaping the satisfaction of community service workers, organisational supports and organisational cultures emerge as key, as these can offer autonomy and variety and mediate work-related stress (Stalker et al, 2007; Borzaga and Tortia, 2006). Worker satisfaction tends to decrease where workers lack discretion, and where practice is standardised or codified into forms to be applied by lower grade workers (Newman and Mooney, 2004, cited in Poole, 2007: 249; Meagher et al, 2009). Further, the amount and type of professional supervision received has been found to be important to worker satisfaction and intention to stay in the job. Barth et al (2008: 204) found the quality of supervision to be the strongest predictor of worker satisfaction in child welfare, with at least two hours of weekly supervision associated with higher levels of satisfaction.

Recruitment and retention

While international studies suggest the non-government sector offers opportunities for satisfying working lives, Australian studies consistently report high turnover of staff. The literature highlights problems of recruitment and retention throughout community services, which are not unique to the non-government sector, or to NSW.

In a recent study, 57 percent of community service organisations across Australia reported difficulties attracting appropriately qualified staff (ACOSS, 2008). In a national survey of non-government social and community services workers, 52 percent reported that they were not committed to staying in the industry longer than five years (ASU, 2007b:3). In Victoria and South Australia, peak agencies and key informants have identified recruitment and retention as key areas for workforce development (VCOSS, 2007, 2008; Carson et al, 2007), while skill shortages have

been identified in Tasmania in child care, aged and disability care, case management, mental health support, housing support, and disability (TLSA and TCOSS, 2007).

Recruitment and retention problems are also evident in community service systems in other countries. In the UK, problems of turnover and unfilled positions have been reported among those working with children and young people (DCSF, 2008). An American study links turnover to the nature of the work, with 81 percent of human service workers agreeing it is easy to burn out in human services, 75 percent describing the work as frustrating, and 70 percent agreeing they had too much work to do (Light, 2003).

Focusing on public and non-government child welfare work in England, Sweden and Australia, Healy et al (2009) identify four sets of disincentives to retaining front line workers: work stress (exacerbated by poor preparation for the work, poor job design and high caseloads); a lack of professional support and development; a culture of blame (including intensive public and management scrutiny); and poor rewards (including low pay, poor career progression, and a lack of recognition and respect). Others emphasise the role of organisational factors only in shaping turnover trends, suggesting change in the way organisations operate may be key to improving employee retention (Barak et al, 2001).

Within Australia, recruitment and retention dynamics differ between geographic areas. Studies highlight the difficulty rural and remote services face in attracting staff, especially where NGO employers cannot offer support for relocation and access to professional development opportunities. While the flexibility of generalist roles in rural services give workers wide opportunities for skill development, jobs of this nature have also been associated with high levels of stress, relating to multiple and ambiguous roles, professional isolation, visibility in the community, and challenges around confidentiality, personal privacy and safety (Green, 2003).

In terms of the factors shaping recruitment and retention, a combination of high commitment to clients, high caseloads, time and resource constraints can lead to unhealthy workloads and high rates of burnout (Barak et al, 2001; Stalker et al, 2006). It should also be noted that while retention is generally considered a goal for sustaining the workforce, some point out it is inappropriate to retain 'burned out' workers, as staff who are strained but do not leave can exacerbate negative outcomes for clients (Strolin et al, 2007).

Recruitment and retention challenges matter because their costs are high and extend beyond the hiring and training of new staff. Unfilled positions and turnover (especially of frontline staff) is problematic, given that effective community service delivery requires the development of relationships between individual workers and clients. Staff vacancies leave gaps in service provision, jeopardising program funding and continuity. Shortages can also strain remaining workers and dampen their effectiveness; deter new recruits; and limit the development of experience and expertise (Healy et al., 2009; Barak et al, 2001). Indeed, turnover means the sector needs to draw increasingly on less experienced workers, at the same time the experienced workers required to supervise them may be in short supply (Curry et al., 2005; Healy et al., 2009).

Undervaluation

A further challenge for the workforce, and one which underpins recruitment and retention challenges, is undervaluation. This relates to the work not being properly rewarded, in terms of pay and career paths, and its contribution not being fully recognised by governments and wider society.

‘Care penalties’ offer one set of explanations for the undervaluation of community services work. As community services work involves providing care to others, it is often considered an extension of women’s mothering and domestic roles. As such, the skilled dimensions of the work are often invisible (Daniels, 1987), assumed to be natural and voluntary rather than resulting from formal learning, and occurring in private, personal interactions and often in people’s homes. Assumptions of care as an intrinsic female proclivity, along with the community service industry’s history of voluntarism, complicate pay claims, contribute to low pay and poor training, and exacerbate the ‘care penalty’, with workers receiving lower rates of pay than they would earn with the same levels of training and experience in other industries where care is not performed (Briggs et al, 2007; CSHISC, 2008; England et al, 2002; Meagher and Healy, 2006).

Additional factors explaining undervaluation include the economic dependence of clients (and their lack of direct purchasing power); difficulties achieving productivity gains in the sector (given the labour intensive nature of the work); and the tendency for work emphasising intrinsic motivation to be paid less (England et al, 2002: 456-459). Further, undervaluation may be reinforced where government funding arrangements do not provide non-government partners with resources to cover the full costs of their work.

Another dimension of undervaluation is a lack of career paths, which constrains the recognition and rewards staff can obtain for developing their skills and experience. In part, this relates to the structure of non-government community services, which are comprised of large numbers of small organisations with comparatively flat hierarchies and time limited funding. Careers thus need to be grouped together by moving between organisations rather than through the ranks of a single organisation. The lack of career paths limits professionalisation and contributes to functional underemployment, as those with relevant qualifications are unable to access a different structure of opportunity than those without qualifications (Healy 2002; Meagher and Healy, 2006: 10). Rewards have also been perceived as limited because the fragmented nature of career paths in the non-government sector. While workers receive paid leave and superannuation while on time limited projects, their movement between organisations means they break their job continuity and are often unable to access long service leave and other benefits accrued by those whose careers develop in a single organisation (or in the government sector), raising the need for portable leave entitlements (MacDermott, 2006: 54; ASU, 2009).

A further dimension of undervaluation is the social status afforded to community services work. Healy (2002: 108) argues there is substantial non-recognition of the complexities and value of workers in the community services sector. She refers to damaging cultural stereotypes reproduced through media portrayals of community service employees as ‘bleeding hearts’, and argues the media has also reinforced the devaluation and of service users, with implications for the status of the whole sector.

The stigma of working with disadvantaged clients may also contribute to undervaluation, as working with very disadvantaged people may cause some workers to underrate their own workplace disadvantages (Briggs et al, 2007; Healy and Meagher, 2004). Further, public perceptions of client's inability to manage their own lives can reinforce perceptions of the low value of working with disadvantaged populations (Pitts, 2001: 32).

Finally, the value of community service work may be inadvertently undermined by workers themselves, where they internalise expectations that they are performing unpaid work in the service of the community, and may choose to accept poor rewards and a lack of recognition. In part, this challenge arises from the strong values and organisational mission of non-profits. Indeed, non-profit employees have been found to be more likely than government or private sector employees to choose their job in order to help the public and make a difference, rather than for job security, pay or benefits (Light, 2002). The degree of worker commitment can thus invite undervaluation and self-exploitation, where compromises are made, such as accepting low pay to keep under-resourced organisations afloat (Light, 2002). Indeed, this 'devotional' aspect of the NGO workforce is considered a major barrier to NGO community services achieving better conditions (Briggs et al, 2007).

Workforce quality

A fourth theme in the literature relates to the quality of the workforce, in particular, the mix of professional and non-professional workers, and dynamics of deprofessionalisation (Healy and Meagher, 2004). While qualifications are necessary or preferred in some community services fields, the workforce consists of those with professional, vocational and no formal qualifications (Briggs et al, 2007).

Concerns have been raised that growth in non-professional jobs are outstripping growth in professional jobs, and that some frontline workers perform challenging work without formal qualifications, and may face barriers to tertiary study, constraining the development of worker and service quality (Spence et al, 2000:2-3). Others suggest the community services workforce has become increasingly skilled. The expansion of tertiary education through the 1980s and 1990s involved a proliferation of three-year undergraduate programs producing community service workers, alongside the four-year social work programs dominating professional practice in the sector (McDonald, 1999: 21). Improving the quality of para-professional employment, competency frameworks have been developed, in consultation with industry and provided mainly by TAFE institutions (McDonald, 1999: 21). In addition, many organisations, as well as professional associations and other networks provide opportunities for skills training. However, these opportunities are not consistently spread, with organisations less likely to invest in training opportunities where there are high proportions of casual or temporary staff, and where resources are constrained. Moreover, concerns have been raised about the quality of training, with short courses perceived as unlikely to provide sufficient opportunity for workers to develop the higher level skills required for reflection, critical thinking and engagement with the broader context of the community services work environment (Spence et al, 2000: 4).

Research and commentary also suggests that higher standards of quality are being expected of the community services workforce, including NGOs. This can be traced

to three main factors: deinstitutionalisation; the increasing complexity of client needs; and the increasing complexity of human service management.

Trends over several decades toward deinstitutionalisation have exacerbated pressure for a higher quality workforce. Deinstitutionalisation has meant that rather than providing routine personal care, frontline workers are required to also support clients in their personal relationships, to help them define and pursue their personal goals, and to facilitate access to community activities and infrastructure. Expectations about how practitioners will work with clients, families and carers in the community mean the skills required are increasingly demanding, compounding the need for highly skilled workers, and the need for organisations to provide education, training and professional development for their staff (Skills Tasmania, 2008:9).

More recently, community service agencies have reported that clients have increasingly complex needs (ACOSS, 2008: 37). This underpins a need for rising numbers of staff, and also compounds the importance of recruiting highly skilled staff, especially those with skills in working across professional boundaries and agencies.

A further set of pressures raising the need for a highly skilled workforce relate to management and administration. Those in non-government organisations have been needed to use skills and competencies defined primarily by the managerial, rather than the practice environment for which they were trained. These include skills for strategic planning, preparing tenders, attending to the legal side of contracting and service delivery, evaluating and costing services, and ensuring accountability to funding agencies (McDonald, 1999).

Overall, these trends relating to worker satisfaction and motivation; recruitment and retention; undervaluation; and worker quality appear evident across community services. However, as explored in the following section, trends may differ between specific community service subsectors, although the workforce in each is not completely discrete.

2.2 Workforce issues in community service industries

This section explores the workforce challenges affecting five key community services sub-industries: child and family services; disability services; alcohol and other drugs; mental health; and housing and homelessness. This is not to suggest that each of these sub-industries has its own discrete workforce, or that each confronts different workforce issues and challenges. Some level of movement of practitioners between these fields could be expected, on the basis that community service sub-industries share some similar tasks and goals, and require some similar skill sets. Indeed, some similar challenges are evident, including those related to recruitment and retention and pay. However, while the community services workforce is not discrete across these five sub-industries, it is helpful to separately consider those research studies which focus on each, as these highlight some nuances in workforce issues and priorities across the different areas of non-government community services.

Child and family services

In child and family services, workforce challenges relate primarily to the composition of the workforce, and the challenges of recruitment and retention.

Debates about workforce composition

Debates about the composition of the child and family services workforce focus on workers' professional backgrounds, and the gender composition of the workforce. In both the statutory and non-government child welfare fields, services are delivered by social workers as well as psychologists, nurses, teachers and others (Meagher et al, 2009), and there have been recent and controversial calls to further diversify the backgrounds of those performing child welfare work (AASW, 2009:8). While there is no central profession, social work and associated professional qualifications are argued to be appropriate entry points into both government and non-government sector child welfare jobs, as graduates are trained to support and empower individuals and families (AASW, 2009).

When it comes to services for children and families, the challenge of attracting male workers to jobs is a persistent theme. As the 2006 Census data above shows (see section 3), the NSW community services workforce is largely female. However, male workers are often considered positive role models for boys, young men and fathers, and may be an under-used source of labour, perhaps due to relatively low pay, and the short hours on offer. While there remains some cultural unease about men working with children and families, those that do work with these populations tend to receive better pay and advancement opportunities than female colleagues, although these are generally inferior to those which they could attract in male-dominated occupations (Cameron, 2006).

Indeed, there has been much debate about the relationship between the gender composition of the workforce and the potential for professionalization. The movement of male workers into the field may prompt improvements in pay, conditions and recognition, while improvements in status and reward may also attract men. However, any relationship between gender segregation and professionalization is currently considered tenuous, at least when it comes to services for children (Cameron, 2006).

Workforce challenges: Recruitment and retention

Research shows evidence of recruitment and retention pressures in child and family services, in Australia and overseas. In the child protection and early intervention field, conditions in the non-government sector workforce are responsive to developments in the government sector. Qualitative research has shown that the effects of large government recruitment drives are felt in non-government child welfare agencies, with standards of skill and professionalism felt to fall in community agencies as workers are drawn to higher paying work in the statutory system (Meagher et al, 2009). Movement of workers from the government to the non-government sector has not proved a clear trend in Australia. In England however, child welfare managers in local authorities reported workers responded to increased managerial oversight and bureaucratisation of their work by seeking opportunities in the NGO sector, which was (at the time of the study) growing as a result of large government partnerships like Sure Start (Meagher et al, 2009).

Recruitment and retention challenges also relate to workers' preparedness for the complexity of child welfare work. In their study of child welfare Healy et al (2009) link problems retaining child welfare workers in both government and non-government agencies with the concentration of inexperienced practitioners at the

frontline. When confronted with the complexity and strain of work in this field, workers who have been inadequately prepared in their studies or who are poorly supported by their organisation reportedly seek more pleasant work in other fields, although in general, the tasks and environment of non-government child welfare work are seen as more attractive than statutory work, especially for experienced professionals (Healy et al, 2009). Indeed, Healy and Meagher (2007) report that child welfare workers in the non-government sector tend to feel better prepared for the complexity of their work than those in statutory child protection, suggesting that “the knowledge and values frameworks in social work and human sciences programs may be more readily applied in non-government agencies, rather than in the more conflictual and ethically challenging environment of statutory service provision” (Healy and Meagher, 2007: 333).

Disability services

Evidence of recruitment and retention challenges are emerging in disability services, especially because of population ageing and, associated, an ageing workforce. Nationally, population ageing presents key challenges, with the disability sector likely to experience a shortage of available workers sooner than other workers, given its age profile and predictions of increasing demand associated with increases in chronic conditions (KPMG, 2006).

Turnover challenges are evident in the states. In Queensland, non-government disability services have reported between 30 and 50 percent staff turnover per year, with the relatively low pay in the sector making it difficult to compete with other industries and with Disability Services Queensland (HCSWC, 2008: 12). In the ACT where there are many well paid public sector options available, workforce planning has been identified as a critical issue, especially attracting younger people to the sector, as the disability workforce is ageing (Disability ACT, 2007).

In Victoria, clients of disability services were found to be more culturally diverse than the workforce, with the workforce lacking in strategies to recruit staff from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (Bini, 2003). While disability services were generally struggling to recruit and retain workers, attracting CALD and bilingual staff provided an added challenge. Best practice strategies avoided on to one matching of people with disabilities and support staff from the same background, but rather incorporated diversity into policy and planning throughout the organisation, including through regular consultation, access and equity statements, professional development, and networking (Bini, 2003).

In NSW, a study of government funded disability service providers in NSW, found the industry to be staffed largely by women, with men in the sector less likely to consider disability services to offer them prospects for their future career (Dempsey and Arthur, 2002). Dempsey and Arthur also found 38 percent of respondents had an educational qualification relevant to the disability area. In terms of professional development needs, the most important area of need was information about disability, and behaviour management (Dempsey and Arthur, 2002). Another study explored allied health professionals’ reasons for leaving jobs in the developmental disability field in rural areas. These related to lifestyle and personal factors; professional development, professional isolation and the need for professional supervision; limited

resources; and the disincentive of flat career structures (Denham and Shaddock (2004).

Establishing minimum qualifications for the sector have been discussed. However, mandatory qualifications may be difficult to introduce because requirements might deter some groups, including casual workers, those with literacy difficulties, and those working in the sector temporarily (e.g. students), as these groups may be unlikely to invest in the necessary qualifications (Disability ACT, 2007). Further, there is no financial incentive for staff to gain credentials, as skill levels are not necessarily linked to remuneration, although some NGOs do differentiate salary levels according to skill levels. However, formal qualifications are considered necessary to improve the sectors attractiveness, to improve the responsibility with which disability support workers make decisions affecting client's quality of life (Disability ACT, 2007).

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) services

Several studies explore workforce challenges in alcohol and other drugs services. In part, the nature of these services, and the skills required, are changing, in response to the wider range of substances available, and improvements in the scientific evidence base, which demand higher levels of skill (Roche, 2002). In addition, the AOD workforce attracted attention following the Drug Summit in NSW in 1999 and the Summit on Alcohol Abuse in 2003, with the NSW Government having established goals and priorities for workforce development (NSWDET, 2005).

Studies have profiled the AOD workforce. The NSW non-government AOD workforce is reportedly 61 percent female, 4 percent Indigenous, and nearly half of workers are over 45 (Argyle Research, 2008). Roles are highly diverse, including clinical treatment, policy, education and advocacy, and ranging across medicine, mental health, social and community services, legal and corrections, and education (NSWDET, 2005). Just over a quarter (27 percent) work part time, while 15 percent are employed casually. Almost half (48 percent) of AOD workers are caseworkers, counsellors and support workers, while almost a quarter (23 percent) work in management and administrative jobs, and the remainder work in the professions. Compared with government run AOD services, NGOs employ smaller proportions of professionals, reflecting both different service models and financial constraints (Argyle Research, 2008: 18).

In the AOD field, the Certificate IV in AOD is generally supported as a good basic qualification for working in the sector, and while some support it becoming a formal minimum qualification standard for the sector, others are wary of the possible consequences. (Deakin and Gethin, 2007; Argyle Research, 2008). According to Argyle Research (2008), 87 percent have a Certificate IV level qualification or above, and 40 percent have an undergraduate degree.

In terms of the sources of workers, AOD NGOs reportedly recruit primarily from other NGOs and government agencies, and from pools of new graduates, former clients and workers in associated sectors. Compared with the government sector, NGOs are more likely to employ workers who are former clients. However, there are issues around recruiting former drug and alcohol users, including poor retention in training, over-identification with clients and poorly maintained professional boundaries, dominance of one's own experience of treatment, insufficient

professional guidelines and unclear protocols around managing relapse (Argyle Research, 2008).

Recruitment and retention challenges

Like in other areas of community services, recruitment and retention are key challenges in the AOD sector. A survey of agencies (most of which were NGOs), showed that 74 percent of agencies, including 94 percent of those in rural and remote areas, found it difficult or very difficult to recruit qualified staff (Pitts, 2001: 33). High turnover among managers has been identified as a particular problem, as well as difficulties recruiting suitably qualified staff in general (Pierce and Long, 2002: 53). Indeed, university qualified workers have been found to be more likely to intend to leave than TAFE qualified workers (Duraisingam et al, 2006).

However, despite widespread concern about turnover rates, another study reports that staffing in the sector is in fact relatively stable, with only 12 percent turnover per year (Argyle research, 2008: 21). 43 percent of workers were not intending to move jobs in the next two years, and of those who felt likely to move, most would do so within their current agency (Argyle research, 2008: 21).

Where retention is a problem, it is unclear how it differs across the government and non-government sectors. While some argue the issues are largely similar (Roche et al, 2004: 256), others point to differences in labour dynamics. NGO workers, for example, are argued to move into the government sector, whereas government workers tend not to move into non-profits. Moreover, those who move from non-profits into government agencies are unlikely to return to the non-profit sector, especially as they would lose benefits and superannuation (Argyle Research, 2008: 21).

In terms of the sources of recruitment and retention difficulties in AOD services, studies point to an inability to compete with the remuneration and conditions offered by the public sector, causing AOD NGOs to lose staff to government services, and turning the NGO sector into the de-facto training ground for government services, especially health and corrections departments (Pierce and Long, 2002: 53). Indeed, in another study, nearly half of AOD workers expressed dissatisfaction with pay, both compared to their co-workers and compared to pay in other organizations. NGO workers were less satisfied with their pay compared to government workers. (Duraisingam et al, 2006). Notwithstanding dissatisfaction with pay, NGOs are recognised to hold workers in the other benefits they offer, like flexibility and autonomy (Argyle research, 2008). Supervisors from non-government agencies are also perceived as more supportive than those in government agencies (Duraisingam et al, 2006).

As well as reward structures, working conditions also contribute to turnover. A survey of AOD workers across Australia (Duraisingam et al, 2006) found nearly a third of frontline AOD workers reported excessive workloads, with female workers more likely to report unfair workloads than men. Staff shortages were a major source of pressure, along with violent and aggressive clients. Access to training is also an issue. Although over half of AOD workers reported that their organization allowed access to professional development opportunities, 54 percent indicated there were no back up staff to enable them to attend training. This was more of a problem in rural areas

(Duraisingam et al, 2006). There are particular difficulties for staff in residential services accessing training, including staff cover, costs, lack of infrastructure. Non-residential services faced barriers to training including cost, especially for regional agencies. (Pierce and Long, 2002: 53).

Factors helping NGOs retain staff include salary packaging, commitment to organizational ethos and treatment model, support for training and development, professional supervision, active prevention of stress, flexibility in hours, staff autonomy, and social events (Argyle Research, 2008: 23) Strategies designed to reduce work stress and retain staff need to focus on role overload, workplace social support, client related pressure, career development opportunities, and pay (Duraisingam et al, 2006).

In terms of the needs of the NGO AOD workforce, research points to the need for workers to develop skills in dealing with high comorbidity, especially substance abuse and mental health disorders, such as identifying mental health needs and working collaboratively with mental health sectors (Argyle Research, 2008: 47). In addition, the over-representation of Aboriginal clients highlights the need to improve skills for working cross-culturally, and the need to increase the supply of trained Aboriginal AOD workers (Argyle research, 2008: 54). Finally, there are indications of high numbers of inexperienced managers, indicating a need to improve access to staff development and training for management roles (Roche, O'Neill and Wolinski 2004:258).

Mental health services

Only a few studies have explored the factors shaping the mental health workforce. It could be expected to have some overlap with the broader health workforce, although community-based services tend to provide more supportive services than acute care.

The recruitment and retention problems evident in other community services subsectors also appear evident in mental health. In Queensland, services in the non-government sector have reported delays in recruiting staff of 3 to 6 months, largely due to low wages and an undersupply of trained and experienced workers (HCSWC, 2008: 14).

Particular challenges relate to rural mental health workers, with pay and organisational and professional supports found to be key to retention, including orientation for new staff. As well as geographical pay parity, lack of access to professional development opportunities is problematic in rural areas. Rather than this simply referring to the need for training and skill development, it also relates to workers' need to be part of a professional community (Wolfenden et al, 1996).

Recruitment and retention difficulties are also evident in mental health services in New Zealand. Encouraging new entrants is seen as key. Mental health workers were perceived to be more difficult to recruit and retain if students on practicum placements had poor experiences, with these experiences proving significant disincentives to specialisation in the field (Southwick and Solomona, 2007). Better education and promotion was felt to be necessary to inform students about pathways and raise the profile of mental health work as a career option.

A further challenge in mental health is the design of jobs, which has been cited as a factor contributing to the exit of workers from mental health services. In particular, role ambiguity and role conflict can be especially problematic for Indigenous and CALD workers who have responsibilities to their own communities and to their clients, and may lack the professional and organisational supports to work between cultural world views (Southwick and Solomona, 2007:22). Targeted mentoring and supervisory supports may assist (Southwick and Solomona, 2007).

Housing and homelessness services

Capacity and sustainability in the homelessness sector is currently important, as demand for services will grow as the economic downturn increases the numbers of people having difficulty accessing affordable housing, and at risk of homelessness.

Trends in housing and homelessness services reflect those in the wider community services workforce. In its recent Homelessness White Paper, the Federal Government identifies challenges of low wages, poor career structures, high staff turnover, low skilled staff, an ageing workforce and difficulties attracting young people to the sector, casualisation, and strain associated with excessive workloads. Developing workforce quality, retaining and attracting staff, and improving career paths are identified priorities, and the Government has stated its commitment to considering adding provisions for 'advanced practitioners' into awards covering employees in specialist homelessness services. However, as most homelessness service workers are employed under state-based SACS awards, the onus is likely to fall on the States to cooperate to ensure improvements in pay and conditions (FAHCSIA, 2008).

The National Youth Commission (2008) acknowledged that despite the increasing professionalism of youth homelessness services, pay remains low. Services report difficulty retaining experienced workers, compromising range and scope of responses for service users, as staff turnover can cause disadvantaged young people to disengage when confronted with the prospect of developing relationships with new staff.

New and recent graduates enter the sector but tend to leave after a couple of years, largely due to poor pay. In addition, the complexity of client issues at youth refuges may be too complex for inexperienced workers to cope with, including the use of crystal methamphetamine (NYC, 2008: 158).

The National Evaluation of the SAAP (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program) identified workforce issues as challenges to service delivery, including workers being stretched to capacity, pay, and low levels of skills, particularly in relation to assessing need and supporting clients with difficult behavior. Trends of younger, less experienced workers using the sector as a starting point before leaving for work meant services were continually providing orientation and entry level training, with limited returns. Clients reported high satisfaction with workers' interpersonal skills but lower satisfaction with their availability and the timeliness of response (Erebus Consulting, 2004: 85)

In small towns, difficulties attracting staff capable of managing and operating services were also identified (Erebus Consulting, 2004: 103). In addition, it is apparently difficult to train staff in rural and remote areas, largely because the costs of attending training are exacerbated by the costs of backfilling and travel. Overall, the

performance of SAAP was reported to be undermined by poor working conditions, a lack of career structure and non-competitive salary levels, especially in rural and remote areas (Erebus Consulting, 2004).

2.3 Workforce strategies

As outlined in Section 1.3, workforce development and management is a shared priority among various levels of government, and among policy makers, funding agencies, and the non-government sector. Several strategies are currently in place, including some with Ministerial leadership, and others led by employers, unions and peak bodies. This section analyses some of the strategies documented in the literature in Australia, in the states and territories, and overseas. These arise from the literature, some as recommendations, some as documented success strategies. Strategies arising from our empirical findings are explored in Sections 5, 6 and 7.

Overall, the literature suggests the need for comprehensive reforms, which address the policy structures and funding arrangements that shape workforce characteristics and trends (Pierce and Long, 2002). While strategies that aim to change the behaviour of individual workers or to encourage employers to develop their own initiatives are welcome, more comprehensive and co-ordinated strategies are required to achieve change at the system level (Roche, 2002; Deakin and Gethin, 2007).

Policy

Workforce trends are linked to the broad orientation of community services policy. On the one hand, systems of early intervention can, in the long term, reduce pressure on community services, by preventing the escalation of need, and demand for intensive services. In the short term however, if NGOs are concentrated in the delivery of preventative services (such as in the child welfare field), a broad policy orientation in favour of early intervention and prevention may exacerbate pressure on the non-government community services workforce.

The quality and resourcing of public services also makes a difference to the NGO workforce. Where public services, such as health, law enforcement or child protection services are under strain, NGO community services may find themselves under pressure to address the unmet need. In the area of alcohol and other drugs for example, ensuring general practitioners and police are able to manage and minimise drug-related harm can help minimise the escalation of risk, and the consequent strain on the NGO workforce (Roche, 2002: 12). Enhancing relationships between sectors, for example through the AOD and mental health sectors, may also help fill skills gaps in each, eventually reducing pressure on both areas of the workforce (Argyle Research, 2008).

Resourcing

Strategies also relate to resourcing. Overcoming workforce challenges requires that government funding be considered an investment in the non-government sector and in non-government organisations as long term partners. As such, the development of compacts or agreements that value relationships between non-government agencies and government, as in NSW, QLD and at the national level (ACOSS, 2008), offer ways forward.

Strategies to improve workforce capacity and sustainability through resourcing include ensuring that funding arrangements allow for infrastructure development and staff training, and ensuring funding contracts allow for wage rises, and provide workers with security, thereby reducing incentives to casualise (which may strain the permanent workforce and contribute to attrition) (Pierce and Long, 2002). While time limited project funding is considered a useful adjunct to renewable funding, it is seen to place undue strain on community organisations and workers where it replaces ongoing funding (NCOSS, 2006). Alternatives to competitive tendering, or the moderation of competitive models, may also offer organisations and workers more certainty about resources (ASU, 2009).

Planning

Workforce planning also offers ways to address workforce challenges. Explicit planning initiatives are underway in a number of community service systems, including in the United Kingdom, where a workforce strategy has been developed for children's services, aligned with the Government's Ten Year Strategy for Childcare (Treasury, 2004). With strong central leadership and a lengthy consultation process, strategic planning has underpinned the creation of a graduate level role of 'early years professional' for the sector.

The Australian government, under the auspices of COAG, has also undertaken some strategic workforce planning, including to respond to problems of capacity and sustainability in the child care workforce. By investing in a workforce strategy for early years services, the aim is to improve the capacity to attract and retain a diverse workforce in children's services, and to ensure the workforce is adequately equipped with skills and knowledge, including in regional, remote and Indigenous communities (OECECC, undated). This involves supporting workers to obtain qualifications through the TAFE and university systems, and better co-ordinating pathways into the early childhood sector (Watson, 2006). Also at a national level (and as mentioned in Section 1.3), workforce planning in disability services has been an agreed priority, with the formation of an industry reference group to develop strategies and improve the coherence of pathways and qualifications in the sector (CDSMC 2008, 2009).

States have also adopted planning strategies to develop the capacity and sustainability of the workforce. In Tasmanian disability services, workforce planning involved development of a five year framework focused on professional learning, human resource management and health and safety, developed jointly by the government and non-government sectors (DHHS, 2007). So far, progress includes workforce surveys, development of a draft education module, and consultation around development of a generic state-wide induction program and base level requirements for disability support workers (DHHS, 2008). In Victoria, the Human Services Partnership Implementation Committee established a workforce board to map current workforce activities, document a workforce profile, identify issues impacting on recruitment, retention and skill development, explore the demographic and geographical differences and constraints impacting on the workforce, and identify strategies to address workforce issues in community services (VCOSS, 2008). In Queensland, the Department of Child Safety has developed a *Rural and Remote Workforce Attraction and Retention Strategy*. Introduced in 2006, this offers public sector child welfare workers incentives to support, attract and retain staff in rural and remote areas, and has reportedly halved the separation rate during 2007-08 (Department of Child Safety,

2008). A similar strategy could be extended to attract non-government sector workers to rural and remote areas.

Importantly, strategic workforce planning may be necessary at a regional level. The Queensland disability services industry for example has collaborated on a regional basis to attract and retain staff, with the focus on recruiting to a region rather than to organisations, and sharing applicants and recruits (HCSWC, 2008: 14).

Professional regulation

In terms of workforce regulation, suggested strategies are for governments to consider setting minimum standards for staffing, supervision, staff development and training (AASW, 2009: 12). Staff accreditation, involving accountability to a registration board, minimum sets of qualifications, models of continuing professional education, and standards of supervision and caseloads, may also be options, as in England under the extensive system of regulation managed by the General Social Care Council (AASW, 2009).

In England, the General Social Care Council acts as the workforce regulator, with a Social Care Register ensuring social workers (to be eventually extended to all care workers) meet registration requirements and are held to account by codes of practice. Qualification frameworks, codes of conduct and practice have been developed to support the development of both educational and employment based qualifications (Higham et al, 2001). In addition, there are common induction standards for social care in England, introduced in 2005, and managed by 'Skills for Care', an employer led authority on training standards and development needs in social care. Importantly however, the extent of workforce regulation has been criticised for its preoccupation with risk, and for reflecting and reinforcing distrust in social workers (McLaughlin, 2007).

Compared with the United Kingdom, Australia doesn't yet have a comparable range of regulatory and oversight agencies to regulate the community service workforce, although advocates increasingly recommend some form of registration or professional accreditation. In the child protection field, the AASW (2009) suggests professional accreditation of staff in the public and community sector, as a way to improve services, and the ASU (2009) has also raised it as an option to explore as a long term commitment to quality service delivery across community services. In the absence of a formal system, professional regulation is left to voluntary membership of associations, and procedures which are internal to agencies, and are subsequently highly varied (AASW, 2009: 11).

Industrial strategies

The industrial sphere offers a further set of strategies for developing the capacity and sustainability of the community services workforce. Award coverage of non-government sector community services workers is, however, relatively recent. As Briggs et al (2007) point out, industrial tribunals have not always recognised the skills involved in community services, work, and many workers in non-government community services organisations remained outside the system of industrial awards until the 1990s (with the first social and community services award being introduced in NSW in 1991). The initial wage rates and conditions in the first SACS award were

low, with an expectation these would improve over time. However, the award was not upgraded for another decade, with some resistance coming from charities concerned about costs and service viability in the context of competition (Briggs et al, 2007).

Industrial strategies have proven difficult in the social services field (Healy and Meagher, 2004). The NGO workforce faces considerable barriers to enterprise bargaining which makes it difficult to achieve pay equity. These barriers are particular to the community sector which is characterised by small organisations, many of which are managed by voluntary committees. In this sector, there is not such a clear distinction between the interests of management and the interests of the workforce; rather it is a conflict between the needs of the sector and the interests of the funding bodies upon whom organisations depend. This poses problems for a traditional union campaign, however recent developments in Queensland show there is potential for industrial strategies.

The Queensland and Australian Services Unions recently mounted an equal pay case in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, winning a wage rise for workers under that states SACS award in early 2009. There were several key elements to the strategy. Involving a coalition of unions and the Queensland Council of Social Services, the claim was made in accordance with the Act determining that an award must ensure the equal remuneration of men and women employees for work of equal or comparable value. The Queensland Services Union (QSU) sought to “achieve pay equity by correcting historical undervaluation, to establish rates which reflect the current value of the work and to ensure that the value of the rates now set maintain currency into the future given that enterprise bargaining is not a feature of this sector” (Commissioner Fisher, 2009). Specifically, this involved adjusting rates to correct historical undervaluation, past incapacity to bargain, with an additional increase in order to maintain the currency of new pay rates.

The Commission supported QSU’s case and found that the “current Award rates of pay do not properly reflect the value of the various classifications” (Commissioner Fisher, 2009:31) and “did not give proper recognition to the duties, skills and responsibilities required” (Commissioner Fisher, 2009:32). Significantly, the Commission looked to the Queensland Public Service professional stream for comparison, on the basis that work performed in the community sector would previously have been carried out in the public sector. Importantly, this also reflected the significant movement of skilled workers from the community sector into the public sector.

The QSUs strategy won an increase of between 18 and 37 percent to the SACS award and there has been some indication from the QLD Premier that these wage increases will be honoured⁴. This will make QLD the state with the highest paid SACS workers – 24 to 34 percent higher than for SACS workers in neighbouring NSW.

⁴ This intention was documented in a letter from the QLD Premier on the 3 November 2008 to the Member for Cook stating: “This Government will fund State Funded Community Service organizations for any QRC award wage increase...” (Commissioner Fisher, 2009:40).

Training and skill development

Training and skills development are other possible workforce strategies. However, the range of skilling initiatives currently in place tend to be poorly coordinated (HCSWC, 2008: 13). Some government agencies have chosen to invest in training in the sector, including in disability services and in the youth sector in Queensland (HCSWC, 2008: 13). Peak bodies are a key means of providing training, with VCOSS for example having a clearinghouse that delivers free training, consulting and collaborations to build skills and strengthen capacity (VCOSS, 2008).

Other strategies include encouraging more specific curriculum in undergraduate degrees, especially in child protection (AASW, 2009); including co-morbidity training in AOD work to ensure AOD workers can identify mental illness and work with mental health agencies (Argyle Research, 2008); and recruiting male workers to early childhood, for example through men-only training courses.

Importantly however, strategies should consider the multiple sources of learning and skill development, not just formal qualifications and training (Misko, 2008). Indeed, skill development also arises from job design, supervision and mentoring. Other strategies thus include on the job practice and experience, action learning, sharing of ideas and information among peers, job rotation and redesign to promote cross-skilling, coaching and mentoring. However, these strategies of on-the-job training may be more appropriate for existing workers possessing basic skills in the field. Entry level workers are likely to be best prepared by on the job experience in a supervised environment, combined with formal training (Misko, 2008).

Job design

Rethinking job design offers a further set of strategies for improving workforce capacity and sustainability. Ensuring jobs are structured to allow for pay progression, career paths and skills recognition can help overcome recruitment and retention challenges (AASW, 2009), and the addition of an 'advanced practitioner' classification into the SACS award offers a possible way forwards for those skilled workers who seek progression without going into management or for those people currently performing these roles without adequate remuneration (ASU, 2009).

Within organisations, the design of jobs to include effective mentoring, leadership and supervisory structures can attract and retain quality staff who are committed to the organisation even if they can earn more money elsewhere (Southwick and Solomona, 2007). The Victorian Governments Action Plan for Strengthening Community Organisations, for example, sets out a commitment to addressing workforce challenges by investing in leadership development, articulating a framework of capabilities, and developing mentoring systems (VCOSS, 2008: 36).

Overall, workforce development is likely to entail the integration of a combination of strategies involving policy, resourcing, planning, professional and industrial regulation, training and skill development, and job redesign. Many examples of strategies in these categories are currently in place. Section 7 will present the findings from the empirical component of the study and will outline the strategies that study participants identified for reform.

3 Data review

This section reviews available data sources, and provides recent evidence as to the size of the NGO community services workforce in NSW, and some of its defining demographic characteristics.

Overall, national statistical data sources provide only limited information about the community services workforce (Martin and Moskos, 2006), and even less information is available about workers employed in non-government organisations. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has pointed to a lack of regularity and consistency in community services data collections at the national level; a lack of information about the specific areas of child protection, juvenile justice, child, youth and family services, disability, housing and supported accommodation and crisis services; and difficulties in identifying community services subsectors and occupations using the industry and occupational classifications, although classifications have since been updated (Vaughn, 2006).

Data about the non-government component of the community services workforce is especially scant. While the ABS Community Services Survey (ABS, 2001) does report numbers of community service organisations and their expenditures by auspice, this relies on information reported by business managers, rather than employees themselves, and as a consequence, does not contain detailed information about occupations or labour dynamics. Moreover, the study focuses on nursing homes and other aged care accommodation, childcare, residential and non-residential care, rather than the full range of community services.

Also a survey of businesses, the Not-for-profit Organisations Survey (ABS 2008b) reports numbers of organisations, employees, volunteers, income, expenditures and industry value-added. While social services are reported separately, the survey relates to non-profits only, and there is no detailed information about community service subsectors or of the characteristics of employees.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey and the Census of Population and Housing (the “Census”) do not report data specifically about those employed in non-profit organisations. The Labour Force survey lacks information about either pay or qualifications, and because it is a sample survey, it cannot provide reliable estimates of areas where there are small numbers of employees, such as community services subsectors. Analysis of confidentialised unit record files from the 2001 Census proves its potential as a rich, but not unproblematic source of data for community services generally (see Meagher and Healy, 2005, 2006).

In the 2006 Census, a question asking whether employees work in the government or non-government (private) sector was introduced. Presumably because of difficulties determining employers’ auspice from the business name and workplace address provided, the indicator of government/non-government status distinguishes between Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local governments. However, data does not distinguish between commercial and non-profit employers, which are placed in the same category of ‘private sector’. Further, as the Census asks respondents only about their main job, data about those who work in community services as a second job is not collected (Healy and Richardson, 2003, cited by Meagher and Healy, 2005, p22).

Despite its limitations, however, the 2006 Census offers the best data available, and it was used to develop a profile the NSW non-government community services workforce in the following section.

3.1 Evidence from the 2006 Census

ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing data was requested for government and non-government workers in selected occupations using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification by Occupations (ANZSCO). This was cross-tabulated to capture those working in community services industries as defined by the 2006 Australian and New Zealand Industry Classification (ANZSIC). The list of industries requested was designed to include all of those within community services with the exception of residential aged care (ANZSIC 8601) and childcare services (8710). Industries included in our analysis are:

- Other Social Assistance Services (ANZSIC 8790). This consists of units mainly engaged in providing a wide variety of social support services directly to their clients. The primary activities include adoption service; adult day care centre operation, aged care assistance service; alcoholics anonymous operation, disabilities assistance service, marriage guidance service, operation of soup kitchens, welfare counselling service and youth service.
- Other Residential Care Services (ANZSIC 8609). This consists of units mainly engaged in providing residential care (except aged care) combined with either nursing, supervisory or other types of care as required (including medical). The primary activities are children's home operation, community mental health hostel, crisis care accommodation operation, home for the disadvantaged operation n.e.c, hospice operation, residential refuge operation and respite residential care.
- Other Interest Group Service n.e.c. (ANZSIC 9559). This class consists of units mainly engaged in activities which promote the interests of their members (except religious, business and professional, and labour association services). Included in this class are units providing a range of community or sectional interests or in providing civic and social advocacy service not elsewhere classified. The primary activities include community association operation, human rights association operation, and welfare fundraising (ABS, 2008a).
- Adult, Community and other Education, nec (ANZSIC 8219) This consists of units mainly engaged in providing adult, community and other education not elsewhere classified, including instruction in diet, exercise and lifestyle factors; parent education operation; social and interpersonal skills training; and career development and job search training.

To enable a determination on the size of the total employment sector, additional industry classifications were requested:

- Central government administration (ANZSIC 7510). This class consists of units engaged in the setting of central government policy; the oversight of central government programs; collecting revenue to fund central government programs; creating statute laws and by-laws; and distributing central government funds.

- State government administration (ANZSIC 7520). This class consists of units engaged in the setting of state government policy; the oversight of state government programs; collecting revenue to fund state government programs; creating statute laws and by-laws; and distributing state government funds.
- Local government administration (ANZSIC 7530). This class consists of units engaged in the setting of local government policy; the oversight of local government programs; collecting revenue to fund local government programs; creating statute laws and by-laws; and distributing local government funds.

These were cross-tabulated by the occupations employed in NSW. The ANZSCO occupational data was selected at the six-digit level (ABS, 2006b) to include the range of managerial, administrative and service delivery staff employed in the community service industries defined above. The list of workers can be considered in the following categories:

- *Managers* (including welfare centre managers; policy and planning managers; research and development managers)
- *Professionals* (including social workers; psychologists nec)
- *Counsellors* (including careers counsellors, drug and alcohol counsellors, family and marriage counsellors, rehabilitation counsellors; counsellors, nec)
- *Community and welfare workers* (including welfare workers, welfare support workers nfd, community workers, family support workers, parole or probation officers)
- *Aged and disability workers* (including disabilities services officers, aged or disabled carers, personal care assistants, therapy aides, special care workers nfd)
- *Youth and accommodation workers* (including youth workers, child or youth residential care assistants, hostel parents, refuge workers, residential care officers)
- *Health workers* (including health promotion officers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers)
- *Arts and recreation officers* (including community arts workers, recreation officers)
- *Policy and program officers* (including contract administrators, program or project administrators, policy analysts)⁵

⁵ Alternative titles for Aged or Disabled Carer: Home Support Worker; Personal Carer; Personal Care Worker (Provides general household assistance, emotional support, care and companionship for aged or disabled people in their own homes. Skill Level: 4). Community Workers facilitate community development initiatives and collective solutions within a community to address issues, needs and problems associated with recreational, health, housing, employment and other welfare matters. Skill Level: 2 Specialisations include Community Development Officer; Community Support Worker; and Housing Officer. Welfare workers (Alternative Title: Welfare Case Worker) assists individuals, families and groups with social, emotional or financial difficulties to improve quality of life, by educating and supporting them and working towards change in their social environment. Skill Level: 1 (ABS, 2006b)

Where the analysis below refers to non-government employment or the non-government or private sector, this refers to those who do not work in federal, state or local government agencies. Because of the way data is collected in the Census, this includes both for-profit and not-for-profit employers. The total number of people employed in the above industries and occupations in NSW in 2006 was 18,500, constituting 60.1 percent of the community services workforce (Table 1). This provides the best guess as to the size of the population of community services workers from which the sample of survey respondents is drawn (see Section 4).

Table 1 Workers employed in community service occupations by government and non-government organisations and industry, NSW 2006

Community service industries	Non-government	Government	Total
Other Residential Care Services (8609)	2,726	21	2,747
Other Social Assistance Services (8790 & n.s. 8790)	14,605	1,098	15,703
Other Interest Group Services, nec (9559)	903	32	935
Adult, Community and Other Education, nec (8219)	266	7	273
Central Government Administration (7510)	0	2,835	2,835
State Government Administration (7520)	0	5,935	5,935
Local Government Administration (7530)	0	2,364	2,364
Total:	18,500	12,292	30,792
% of Total	60.1%	39.9%	100.0%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, unpublished tables.

Table 2 shows that in terms of occupations, the largest group of non-government community service workers in NSW were employed as aged or disabled carers (9,532 persons, or 51.5 percent), followed by community and welfare workers and youth and accommodation workers. From the overall population in 2006, non-government community services are strongly female dominated with 78.9 percent of workers being female. Importantly, the two largest non-government community service occupations, aged and disability workers, and community workers and welfare workers, were over 80 percent female. Managers were the least strongly female dominated occupation.

Table 2 Workers employed in private (non-government) organisations in community services industries by ANZSCO and gender, NSW 2006

	Male		Female		Total
		%		%	
Managers	144	35.4	263	64.6	407
Professionals	143	16.6	717	83.4	860
Counsellors	175	22.3	611	77.7	786
Community and welfare workers	650	17.5	3,068	82.5	3,718
Aged and disability workers	1,878	19.7	7,654	80.3	9,532
Youth and accommodation workers	701	31.8	1,501	68.2	2,202
Health worker	32	20.5	124	79.5	156
Arts and recreation officers	26	23.2	86	76.8	112
Policy and program officers	159	21.9	568	78.1	727
Total	3,908	21.1	14,592	78.9	18,500

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, unpublished data. Industries included are Other Social Assistance Services (ANZSIC 8790); Other Residential Care Services (ANZSIC 8609); Other Interest Group Service n.e.c. (ANZSIC 9559); and Adult, Community and other Education, nec (ANZSIC 8219).

Geographical locations

Employment data is provided using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) remoteness areas. The areas in the structure (ABS, 2006a) are: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, very remote, and migratory (ie people in transit or offshore).

In terms of geographical location, 12,398 non-government community service workers were employed in major cities in NSW (67% of total), followed by inner regional (25.1%) and outer regional (7%). Very few community service workers were counted in remote, very remote and migratory locations.

Table 3 NGO community service workers in NSW by Geographical location and Gender, 2006

Geographical Location	Male	Female	Persons	% Total
Major Cities	2,684	9,714	12,398	67.0
Inner Regional	963	3,682	4,645	25.1
Outer Regional	231	1,098	1,329	7.2
Remote	21	83	104	0.6
Migratory - no usual Address	5	12	17	0.1
Very Remote	4	3	7	0.0
Total:	3,908	14,592	18,500	100.0%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, unpublished table

In terms of age, Table 4 suggests that workers in non-government community services are slightly younger than those working in the public sector community services, with lower proportions aged over 45 and higher proportions aged under 35.

Table 4 Community service workers in private sector in NSW by age, 2006

Age Range	Persons	%
15-24 years	1,359	7.3
25-34 years	3,410	18.4
35-44 years	4,512	24.4
45-54 years	5,734	31.0
55-64 years	3,153	17.0
65 years and over	341	1.8
Total:	18,509	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, unpublished table.

Together, these data provide some evidence of the size and scope of the non-government community services workforce, where the workforce is defined as those in relevant ANZSCO occupations and the community service industries relevant to the study (ie those not including childcare and residential care). Within the non-government workforce, the largest groups of workers are carers of aged or disabled, followed by community and welfare workers and youth and accommodation workers, and the sector is highly female dominated overall.

While this data provides new information about the community services workforce, more comprehensive workforce development and planning initiatives would require more analytical datasets, which would include worker demographics along with other information, for example rates of staff turnover and costs for organisations, training patterns, hours, pay and salary packaging (NDS, 2008), underlining the importance of surveys such as that reported in Section 4.

4 Survey of community service labour dynamics

While the Census data in Section 3.1 gives some indication of the demographic profile of the community services workforce employed in the government and private sectors, it says little about labour dynamics, and current and future challenges. For this reason, a survey of community service dynamics, the *NSW NGO Workforce Survey*, was developed.

4.1 Methodology and design

Issues covered

The NSW NGO community services workforce survey instrument is contained at Attachment A. The 150 item survey was developed to identify the characteristics of workers and their workplaces, to provide insight into worker experiences, and to identify key labour dynamics, through an assessment of movement between jobs and industries, and workers' career plans. The survey covered the following issues:

- *Main job*: multiple job holding; type of service (main job); size of organisation and workplace; gender concentration; contract of employment; trade union membership; job type; perceived efficacy of frontline service provision;
- *Working hours*: paid hours; reasons for working part time; unpaid overtime; time usually spent in frontline service provision;
- *Supervision*: frequency of supervision meetings; purpose of supervision;
- *Training*: attendance at professional development; attendance at education or training through main employer; contribution to costs of training; perceived benefits of training;
- *Education*: Qualifications; perceptions of preparation for work in community services; current study;
- *Leave*: time on workers' compensation, annual and sick leave;
- *Pay*: pay rates; use of salary packaging;
- *Job satisfaction*: Overall satisfaction; perceptions of job stress, use of skills, and job complexity; flexibility at work; repetition of tasks.
- *Career history*: history of voluntary work; years in community services; number of paid positions held in community services; time in NGOs; time in current position; time with current employer; previous job in community services; reasons for leaving last job;
- *Employment prospects*: Intention to stay in workforce, in community services and in current organisation; prospects of retirement and retrenchment; job search; factors affecting intention to leave.
- *Perceptions of organisations*: Perceptions of benefits of working in non-government, government and for-profit sectors;
- *Family friendly working arrangements*: Access to conditions and entitlements like paid maternity leave; work to family spill-over; family to work spill-over; difficulty accessing childcare.

- *Worker characteristics:* Sex, age, ATSI status, country of birth; postcode of residence; work location.

The survey's core questions were based on those in the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) Wave 7. Supplementary questions were added to explore issues relevant to the study not covered by the HILDA questions. HILDA provides a rigorous basis for a study of community services labour dynamics. It is a household panel study which began in 2001 and collects information about labour market and family dynamics, socio-economic status and subjective wellbeing from a representative sample of Australian households. Wave 7 was collected in 2007-08 and released in early 2009, so provides the most recent comparative data. Using HILDA questions as a basis for a study of community services industries, and as a basis for comparison, offered advantages for instrument design and for analysis:

- HILDA focuses on labour dynamics, so its questions were well suited to the purpose of the study.
- HILDA questions were validated and refined over seven waves of data collection, including (though not specifically) in non-government community services contexts.
- Supplementary questions specific to community services, and deemed relevant to the project, were added to the core questions drawn from HILDA.
- Basing the survey on HILDA (with supplementary questions) allows analysis of labour dynamics in the NSW NGO sector in the context of the wider workforce. Data from HILDA Wave 7 provides benchmark data against which the community services NGO workforce in NSW can be compared.
- As HILDA is continuing until at least Wave 12, aligning survey instruments leaves open opportunities to continue to track dynamics in NGO community services against changes in the broader workforce in future.

The survey was revised after being piloted with community sector workers and advisors. It was offered primarily as an online survey, but also in hard copy form, to ensure it reached those without internet access, or who preferred to complete a paper copy.

Sampling and survey distribution

There is no central database of non-government community services workers in NSW from which to draw a sample. Instead, the population was estimated using 2006 Census data (see Section 3.1), and administered the survey to a sample of the workforce based on non-government community service organisations (other than childcare or residential aged care) funded by DoCS (1494, see Table 5) and DADHC (744) in NSW⁶, along with organisations who were members of the NSW Council of Social Services, and individual members of the Australian Services Union. There is likely to have been some overlap in these groups.

⁶ The total number of organizations to which the survey was sent was 2238. This included 860 DADHC funded organisations. However, 116 of these were councils, whose employees were not eligible to participate in the survey. Note that there may have been some overlap between organizations funded by DoCS and DADHC.

Information about the survey was sent to the senior representatives in community agencies who are DoCS and DADHC's regular contacts for communications, with recipients asked to forward the information throughout their organisations, including with routine staff communications. Survey dissemination was primarily via email and participation in the online version of the survey was encouraged. However, not all relevant workers have access to email and the internet. According to a survey of the information and communication technology needs of the NSW NGO human services sector conducted by NCOSS, around 72 percent of staff reportedly have email accounts (Mahony, 2008). Where DoCS and DADHC were not in regular communications with funded services via email (for example where there was no address or where organizations did not use the established portal system), the survey was also distributed via hard copy with reply paid envelopes. Recognising that many community service workers would not have access to email, hard copies were also made available to organizations and individuals on request.

Table 5 (below) shows the range of DoCS-funded services which were sent the survey.

Table 5 Survey distribution to DoCS funded services

Funding Program:	Surveys sent via E-mail	Surveys via Surface Mail	Total sent
Alcohol & Other Drugs Program	14	7	21
Children's Services Program	68	36	104
Community Services Grants Program	575	146	721
Early Intervention Program	24	10	34
Families NSW Program	142	50	192
Indigenous Initiatives	54	14	68
Other Whole of Government Program	4	4	8
Out-Of-Home Care	30	28	58
Supported Accommodation Assistance Program	193	45	238
Youth and Better Futures Program	44	6	50
Total:	1148	346	1494

To ensure the capture of workers in all relevant organisations, information was also emailed to organisational members of the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) and individual members of the Australian Services Union in NSW. Placement of links to the survey on relevant websites and e-discussion lists that NGO workers may visit, including the SPRC website and the NSW Government's 'communitybuilders' site; Community Net, and the Local Community Services Association (NSW) site. The survey generated interest throughout the sector, with other organisations placing links on their website for members to access.

With good coverage of the main community services industries and occupations, the survey helps to construct a more comprehensive picture of the NSW NGO workforce than has been available to date.

Limitations

The methodology, however, has some limitations. According to the Census analysis in Section 3, the best estimate is that survey responses (2,473) came from around 13.4 percent of relevant community services workers in the private sector (non-profit and

commercial) sector in NSW. However, as detailed previously, the Census does not cover the exact population in this study (private sector includes both for profit and non-profit), and was conducted three years ago, in 2006.

Further, limitations of the administration method mean not all the workers targeted would have received the survey. While information is known about the number of DoCS and DADHC funded organisations that were sent the survey, there is no perfectly definitive information about the population of individual workers who would have received the survey, as government funding agencies do not collect information about the numbers of staff in funded services. As well, the number of people who would have received information about the survey, for example through word of mouth or on websites, is unclear.

Moreover, in a practical sense, the methodology relied on service provider organisations or members notifying staff about the survey, and it cannot be certain that this was done consistently across organisations or within any organisation. As such, the sampling strategy was not ideal, and respondents are not a perfectly representative sample of the population. Notwithstanding, the survey sample is consistent with other studies on key indicators (such as gender and age), and does allow exploration of the structure, characteristics and dynamic of the NSW NGO community services workforce in more detail than previous studies.

4.2 Survey findings

Overall, the total number of workers that completed the survey was 2,473. The findings presented below outline the demographic characteristics of respondents; the characteristics of respondents' main job; working conditions; training and professional development; educational qualifications; career history and intentions; and family friendly working arrangements. To help understand the survey data in context, it is compared with indicators drawn from HILDA Wave 7 (consisting of 2663 employees in NSW), and the 2006 Census.

Respondents' demographic characteristics

Gender

Overall, 2,473 workers completed the survey. Reflecting the gender imbalance in community services, women made up 83.2 percent of survey respondents. In contrast, women comprise 46.0 percent of employed people in New South Wales, according to the 2006 Census. The over-representation of women in the sample is unsurprising, with female dominance previously being a well documented characteristic of the community services workforce (Meagher and Healy, 2005; ASU, 2007), and in the Census analysis in Section 3.1.

While females constituted 83.2 percent of survey respondents overall, there were higher proportions of female respondents from child family and youth services (86.9 percent) where a high number of respondents are clustered, and from multiservice agencies (including neighbourhood centres) where 87.0 percent of respondents worked. Housing and legal services (78.6 percent female), and peak bodies (76.7 percent female) had slightly lower proportions of women responding.

As shown in the following Table, the highest proportions of women reported being administrative workers (91.3%), allied health workers or counsellors and mediators.

Table 6 Gender by job type*

	Male	% male	Female	% female	Total:
Support worker	69	19.8	279	80.2	348
Case worker	54	16.2	280	83.8	334
Project officer	14	15.2	78	84.8	92
Allied health worker	4	10.3	35	89.7	39
Nursing or other health work	4	36.4	7	63.6	11
Community development worker	11	12.5	77	87.5	88
Research or policy worker	6	15.0	34	85.0	40
Administrative worker	22	8.7	231	91.3	253
Manager or co-ordinator	199	19.2	838	80.8	1,037
Other (please specify)	22	13.3	144	86.7	166
Counselling/mediation	2	10.5	17	89.5	19
Employment consultant/officer	3	15.0	17	85.0	20
Lawyer or para-legal	3	42.9	4	57.1	7
Teacher/Trainer/Educator	2	15.4	11	84.6	13
Total	415	16.8	2,052	83.2	2,467

*Note that these job categories differ from the ANZSCO occupations reported in Section 3.1.

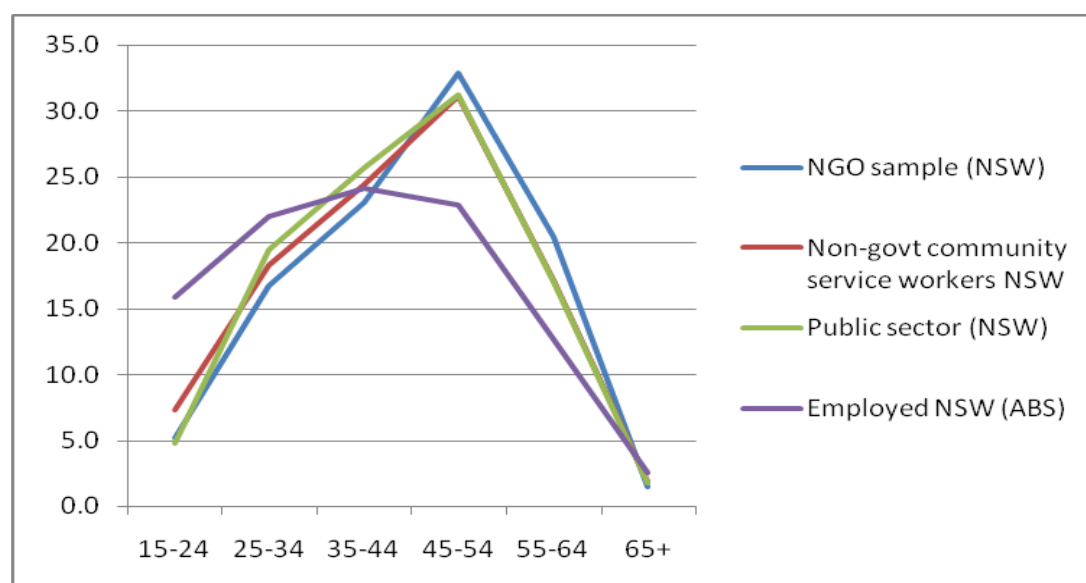
Age

As shown in Table 7, the age distribution of survey respondents is similar to that of the non-government community service workforce in NSW as counted in the Census, and to the state public sector workforce in NSW. Compared with all employed persons in NSW however, the non-government community services workforce is older, with higher proportions of workers concentrated in the middle age groups, especially in the 45 to 54 year old age group. Smaller proportions of workers in non-government community services are aged under 25 and 25 to 34 compared with all employees in NSW, raising questions about likely sustainability as the community service workforce ages.

Table 7 The age profile of the NGO sample

	NGO Survey sample	Non-government community service workers, NSW (Census) (%)^	NSW Public sector (%)^^	All Employed, NSW (%)*
15-24	5.2	7.3	4.8	15.8
25-34	16.8	18.3	19.5	22.0
35-44	23.1	24.4	25.7	24.1
45-54	32.9	31.1	31.2	22.9
55-64	20.4	17.1	17.0	12.7
65+	1.5	1.9	1.8	2.6

Sources: ^2006 Census of Population and Housing unpublished tables
^^DPC, 2008 *2006 Census of Population and Housing

Figure 1: The age profile of the NGO sample (%)

ATSI and CALD workers

The vast majority of respondents were born in Australia (1856 respondents or 75 percent of the sample) or in the main English speaking countries (344 respondents or 14 percent), with only 11 percent (271 persons) born outside the main English speaking countries. In comparison, 69 percent of residents of NSW were born in Australia, according to the 2006 Census.

Eighty-three survey participants identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both, making up 3.5 percent of the survey sample. In comparison, Indigenous people make up 2.1 percent of the population in NSW and 1.2 percent of the workforce (2006 Census), suggesting Indigenous representation in the non-government community services workforce may be higher than in the general community.

Location

Nearly 53.8 percent of the sample (1,331 respondents) reported working in an urban area or on the urban fringes. 25.4 percent of respondents (627) were located in regional centres and 18 percent of respondents (445) reported working in a rural area. There were limited numbers of respondents from remote areas (26 respondents, or just over 1 percent of the sample)⁷.

Union membership

According to the ASU figures, around 28 percent of the community services NGO workforce are union members. The survey reflects slightly higher rates of union membership (35.8 percent). This may be explained in that those who are union members were perhaps more likely to participate in the survey or may have become aware of the survey or encouraged to participate by the ASU. However, the larger

⁷ Note these definitions differ from those in Section 3.1, so cannot be compared.

numbers may also be explained in that the question asked whether respondents were members of a trade union or employee association. Where the question was asked with the same wording in the HILDA Wave 7, 25.5 percent of employees in NSW reported being members of unions or employee associations.

In the NGO sample, those who were more likely than average to be members of unions or employee associations worked in the housing and legal service sector, community based health, peak bodies, multi-service agencies (including neighbourhood centres) and cultural organisations.

Table 8 Union membership by service type

	Union members	Total	% in union
Housing and legal	124	220	56
Community-based health service	67	123	54
Peak body	34	84	40
Multi-service agency	134	352	38
Cultural	15	39	38
Child, Family & Youth	223	625	36
Other or unknown	52	151	34
Community-based ageing and disability care	193	658	29
Employment, finance, emergency relief	39	150	26
Total	881	2,402	37

As shown in Table 9, workers aged 15-24 were the least likely to be union members, at around 2 percent of the sample. The likelihood of union membership does increase with age, peaking in the 45-54 age cohort.

Table 9 Union membership by age

Age group	Number of workers	%
15-24	16	1.8
25-34	124	14.1
35-44	189	21.5
45-54	329	37.3
55-64	205	23.3
65 and over	18	2.0
Total:	881	100.0

Characteristics of respondents' main job

Service type

As shown in Table 10, the majority of respondents came from community-based aged and disability care services (676 persons or 27.3 percent) as well as child, family and youth services (643 respondents or 26.0 percent). The lowest numbers of respondents were working in cultural services (migrant and Indigenous services) (41 respondents or 1.7 percent).

Table 10 Respondents by service type

	Number	%
Community-based ageing and disability care	676	27.3
Child, Family & Youth	643	26.0
Multi-service agency (including neighborhood centres)	355	14.4
Housing and legal	224	9.1
Employment, finance, emergency relief	161	6.5
Community-based health service	129	5.2
Peak body	86	3.5
Cultural	41	1.7
Other or unknown	158	6.4
Total	2473	100.0

Size of organisation and workplace

As Table 11 shows, just over a third of respondents were employed in both large organisations with more than 100 employees (34.2 percent) and small organisations with less than 20 employees (35.6 percent).

Respondents' actual workplaces were smaller. 41.6 percent of the sample (1,020 respondents) indicated there were less than 10 employees in their current workplace, and 70.0 percent (1700 respondents) reported working in workplaces with less than 20 staff.

Table 11 Respondents by organisation and workplace size

	Employees in organisation		Employees in workplace	
	No	%	No	%
One person (self)	29	1.2	69	2.8
2 to 4	173	7.0	312	12.6
5 to 9	326	13.2	639	25.8
10 to 19	351	14.2	680	27.5
20 to 49	409	16.5	454	18.4
50 to 100	234	9.5	171	6.9
More than 100	847	34.2	100	4.0
Don't Know	102	4.1	28	1.1
Total	2471	99.9	2453	99.2
Missing	2	.1	20	.8
Total	2473	100.0	2473	100.0

Contract type

Only a small percentage of respondents reported being employed by labour hire firms (1.5 percent). This is less than the 2.2 percent figure reported for NSW in HILDA Wave 7, and may reflect either that labour hire arrangements are not a key feature

affecting labour dynamics in the NGO community services sector, or that the survey did not reach those working under such arrangements.

In terms of contract type, almost 80 percent of respondents (1,977) indicated they were on a permanent or ongoing contract, 15.2 percent (376) indicated they were employed on a fixed term contract and only 3.5 percent of respondents (86) indicated they were employed on a casual basis.

This suggests the proportion of permanent workers may be on par with the NSW public sector, in which 80% were also found to be employed on a permanent or ongoing basis (DPC, 2008). However, there is likely to be some sample bias here, with the survey more likely to reach core workers, with more secure contracts, than casual staff who may be outside routine staff communications and unable to complete surveys in paid time.

Moreover, there is likely to be less clarity around employment terms and conditions in the NGO community services workforce than in the public sector. Those employed as 'permanent' or 'long term' casuals or on consecutive (rolling) fixed term contracts may report their employment as ongoing. Differences between the legal meaning of a casual contract and lay understandings of casual work as intermittent or time limited is likely to have resulted in some respondents identifying as being in a permanent or ongoing position because their employment is continuous, even where they lack access to entitlements such as paid annual or sick leave.

For more reliable data, future surveys should provide the definition of a casual employee as per the ABS definition, that is, people paid by the hour with no entitlements. However, even if the sample under-reports the proportion of workers on casual and fixed-term contracts, in some areas the use of casual workers is particularly high: 29 percent of respondents in cultural (migrant and Indigenous) services, for example, were on fixed-term contracts. The highest proportions of workers on permanent contracts were found in housing and legal services.

Multiple job holding

From the survey respondents, 2,118 people (85.6 percent of respondents) worked in only one job, while 355 people or (14.4 percent of respondents) were employed in two or more jobs. Of these, approximately half had another job which was not in a non-government community organisation. Multiple job holding among respondents appears more than double that in the wider workforce of NSW: Wave 7 of the HILDA Survey shows that only 7.0 percent of the workforce in NSW held more than one job. This perhaps reflects the high levels of part time work in community services (see below).

Working hours

As could be expected (Meagher and Healy, 2006), there are high proportions of part time workers in community services, which perhaps explains the high rates of multiple job holding. In the NGO survey, 37.6 percent of respondents indicated they worked part time hours (less than 35 hours a week), compared with 29 percent of NSW workers in HILDA Wave 7.

In the NGO sample, there were higher proportions of part time workers in some sub-sectors. Over 40 percent of respondents in child, family and youth services, housing and legal services, community based health services and multi service agencies reported working on a part time basis. Peak bodies had the lowest proportion of part time workers (25.6 percent).

High rates of part time hours can act as a disincentive for men entering the sector. Indeed, respondents' performance of part time hours follows a distinct gender pattern – the fewer number of hours worked per week, the higher the likelihood those hours are being performed by women. Forty-one percent of female respondents were employed in a part time capacity, and 25.5 percent of men worked part time, 59.2 percent of support workers worked part time, as did relatively high proportions of managers and co-ordinators (27.5 percent).

Clearly, there is some preference for part time work in the non-government community services workforce. In terms of reasons for working part time, 181 respondents (19.4 percent of those working part time) listed caring for children as the main reason, compared with 18 percent in HILDA Wave 7. Twenty-one percent of part time workers indicated that they did so because they preferred part time work, only slightly lower than the 21.7 percent reported in HILDA.

Most significant to the workforce dynamic is that 30.3 percent of part time workers in NGO community services reported that they worked part time because part time work was all that was offered. In the survey, this option was expressed slightly differently to that in HILDA. Notwithstanding, the figure is considerably higher than the 8.5 percent of HILDA respondents who reported working part time because part time hours were a requirement of the job.

Time spent on frontline provision

Workers were asked to state the proportion of their paid time they usually spend in direct frontline provision, that is to include time spent directly with service users (including face to face meetings and telephone contact). As shown in Table 12, just under half of respondents, or 44.6 percent, indicated they spend more than 60 percent of their paid time at the frontline, while 28.1 percent of respondents indicated they spend more than 80 percent of their paid time at the frontline.

Table 12 Proportion of time spent in frontline provision by job type

	Less than 60% of time		More than 60% of time		More than 80% of time	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Support Worker	92	26.4	256	73.6	190	54.6
Case Worker	103	30.8	231	69.2	119	35.6
Manager or co-ordinator	721	69.5	316	30.5	193	18.6
Total	1335	55.4	1073	44.6	676	28.1

As would be expected, case workers and support workers made up the highest proportions of those spending more than 60 percent of the time at the frontline (73.6 and 69.2 percent respectively). However, relatively high proportions of managers and

coordinators also did so, with 30.5 percent of them spending more than 60 percent of their time in direct provision.

As shown in Table 13, higher proportions of women than men reported providing high levels of frontline provision (more than 60 or 80 percent), and higher proportions of men than women reported spending less than 20 percent of their time in frontline service provision.

Table 13 Proportion of time spent in frontline provision by gender

Gender	Under 20%	20-39%	40-59%	60-79%	80-100%	total
Male (no)	129	55	73	63	96	416
Male (%)	31.0	13.2	17.5	15.1	23.1	100.0
Female (no)	492	276	341	348	600	2057
Female (%)	23.9	13.4	16.6	16.9	29.2	100.0

Working conditions

Leave

Table 14 shows that 4.3 percent of respondents had spent some time on workers' compensation in the last 12 months, which is higher than the figure representing the wider NSW workforce from HILDA: 2.9 percent. However, more NGO respondents reported spending time on annual leave or sick leave than in the HILDA sample. On average, workers in the sample reported taking 17 days of paid annual leave and an average of 5.7 days of paid sick leave in the past 12 months, which is also considerably longer than those in the HILDA sample. While this suggests higher levels of access to paid annual and sick leave in the NGO community services sector than in the broader workforce, it may also reflect the under-representation of casual workers in the NGO survey.

Table 14 Use of leave, NGO workers and HILDA sample

	% who spent time on workers comp	Average days on workers comp	% who spent time on paid annual leave	Average days on annual leave	% who spent time on paid sick leave	Average days on sick leave
NGO sample	4.3	10.3	81.6	17.0	71.7	5.7
HILDA	2.9	0.7	56.9	9.7	48.8	2.7

Access to flexible and family friendly working arrangements

In terms of family friendly working arrangements, the data indicates access to some forms of flexible work is common in the NSW NGO community services sector. As shown in Table 15, NGO workers had higher levels of access to special leave to care for family members, flexible start and finish times, and child care facilities or subsidies. This is significant given that 34.6 percent of respondents were caring for at least one child under the age of 17.

However, the proportion reporting they had access to paid maternity leave was dramatically lower than in the broader NSW workforce: 26.2 percent compared to 51.9 percent. This is likely to be a particular concern for recruiting and retaining women workers, and in particular, for parity of conditions in the NGO and public sectors for women of childbearing age.

Table 15 Access to flexible and family friendly working arrangements

	HILDA	NGO study
Paid maternity leave	51.9	26.2
Special leave for caring for family members	72.3	74.6
Permanent part time work	73.6	68.9
Flexible start and finish times	57.8	74.8
Child care facilities or subsidised child care expenses	9.8	11.9

Pay

Of those who reported receiving an hourly wage, the average rate reported was \$27.15 per hour. Of those reporting an annual salary, the average level reported was \$56,375 before tax was taken out. Given the limitations of the survey methodology outlined so far, the high proportion of managers in the survey, and the likely under-representation of casuals, these pay rates are likely to be higher than true averages for the sector.

As indicated in the focus groups and stakeholder interviews conducted for this study, respondents were largely dissatisfied with their pay, despite salary packaging opportunities.

Salary packaging

Salary packaging is a way non-government organisations can supplement workers' remuneration. Of those who answered the question (38.8% of the sample, or 960 people), 82.1 percent indicated they did have access to salary packaging in their workplace. The most common items to salary sacrifice were mortgage payments or rent, followed by credit cards. Motor vehicles and superannuation were also items that were commonly sacrificed. Importantly, 13.6% of those who reported that their employer offered salary packaging options reported that they did not salary sacrifice any items.

In line with previous suggestions (ACOSS, 2008), this indicates that while salary sacrificing may be an important component of the rewards many non-government sector workers receive, it should not be considered to be universally available. Moreover, even in those organisations where it is offered, it is not an option which is necessarily used by workers, although the reasons for this are unclear. Indeed, extending access to salary sacrificing options, and ensuring consistency of benefits where it is offered, may provide a strategy for improving rewards and helping to recruit and retain staff in non-government community services.

Table 16 Types of items reportedly salary sacrificed

Type of items (multiple response)	Number	%
Mortgage payments or rent	390	40.6
Credit Card/Debit Card	139	14.5
Nothing	131	13.6
Superannuation	124	12.9
Motor Vehicle	106	11.0
General bills/living expense	44	4.6
Insurance	39	4.1
Mobile telephone or home telephone	37	3.9
Computer	29	3.0
Health benefits (eg. Gym membership)	25	2.6
Entertainment/meals	21	2.2
Union membership	19	2.0
Study costs or HECS	17	1.8
Personal Loan	10	1.0
Childcare	3	0.3
Total responses	1134	

Job satisfaction

As shown in Table 17, around 40 percent of survey respondents reported being unsatisfied with their current level of pay, rating their satisfaction as 4 or less on a scale of 0 (least satisfied) to 10 (most satisfied), and around a quarter of respondents reported being dissatisfied with their job security. This was supported by qualitative data collected from the focus groups with workers stating that they were extremely dissatisfied by low levels of pay and the mechanisms for wage improvements. In contrast, respondents were highly satisfied with the work itself, with 77.7 percent reporting satisfaction levels of 7 or above.

Table 17 Satisfaction with current pay, job security and the work itself

Levels of satisfaction	Pay		Job security		The work itself	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Least satisfied	147	5.9	88	3.6	7	0.3
1	159	6.4	106	4.3	22	0.9
2	227	9.2	131	5.3	30	1.2
3	274	11.1	137	5.5	54	2.2
4	179	7.2	158	6.4	65	2.6
5	344	13.9	286	11.6	173	7.0
6	263	10.6	250	10.1	201	8.1
7	347	14.0	366	14.8	391	15.8
8	320	12.9	450	18.2	597	24.1
9	120	4.9	266	10.8	526	21.3
Most satisfied	93	3.8	235	9.5	407	16.5
Total	2,473		2,473		2,473	

Eighty-four per cent of survey participants indicated that they were satisfied with their job, with 80 percent indicating that they were satisfied with the flexibility available to balance work and non-work commitment (Table 18). Focus group participants reported that satisfaction with working with clients over-rode weaknesses of the job. This was coupled with organisations being creative in packaging the positions with offers of flexibility and other attractive working conditions.

Table 18 Satisfaction with current hours, flexibility and overall job satisfaction

Levels of satisfaction	Hours		Flexibility		Job satisfaction	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Least satisfied	32	1.3	40	1.6	21	0.8
1	43	1.7	43	1.7	19	0.8
2	68	2.7	67	2.7	37	1.5
3	98	4.0	74	3.0	47	1.9
4	105	4.2	92	3.7	80	3.2
5	188	7.6	181	7.3	186	7.5
6	199	8.0	176	7.1	245	9.9
7	379	15.3	307	12.4	465	18.8
8	546	22.1	464	18.8	585	23.7
9	433	17.5	484	19.6	524	21.2
Most satisfied	382	15.4	545	22.0	264	10.7
Total	2,473		2,473		2,473	

Compared with HILDA respondents (representing the wider NSW workforce), NGO workers appear less satisfied with key measures of their work. This is depicted in Table 19. This table shows that compared with the broader NSW workforce, higher proportions of NGO workers were dissatisfied with their pay with almost 40 percent stating that they were dissatisfied as compared with 13 percent. As well, the differences were noted with on the question of job security, with around a quarter of survey respondents stating that they were not satisfied with job security as compared to 7.5 percent of the wider NSW workforce.

Table 19 Respondents satisfaction with key dimensions of their jobs*

		Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
Pay Satisfaction	HILDA W7	13.3	10.2	76.5
	NGO Survey	39.8	13.9	46.2
Job security	HILDA W7	7.5	6.1	86.3
	NGO Survey	25.1	11.6	63.4
The work itself	HILDA W7	6.6	6.7	86.7
	NGO Survey	7.2	7	85.8
Hours worked	HILDA W7	11.0	9.6	79.3
	NGO Survey	13.9	7.6	78.3
Flexibility to balance work & non-work	HILDA W7	11.3	9.3	79.4
	NGO Survey	12.7	7.3	79.9
Overall job satisfaction	HILDA W7	5.5	7.2	87.3
	NGO Survey	8.2	7.5	84.3

*Based on 2473 NGO survey responses and 2638 HILDA responses

Although the literature review and focus group respondents suggest community service workers have high levels of satisfaction with the type of work they do, the data suggests they differ little on this measure from the wider NSW workforce. Similarly, measures of respondents' satisfaction with the hours worked, the flexibility to balance work and family commitments, and overall job satisfaction differ little from the wider workforce (see Table 19).

Work strain, security and complexity

Compared with the rest of the NSW workforce, higher proportions of NGO survey respondents reported that their work was stressful, time pressured, complex, and that it gave them a variety of interesting things to do (see Table 20). Compared with HILDA respondents, higher proportions of NGO workers disagreed that they were paid fairly and that they had a secure future in their jobs, and lower proportions agreed with these statements.

Table 20 Indicators of work strain, security and complexity

		Disagree	Neutral	Agree
My job is more stressful than I had ever imagined	HILDA W7	63.1	16.4	20.5
	NGO Survey	36.2	17.2	46.5
I get paid fairly	HILDA W7	24.8	17.3	57.9
	NGO Survey	51.6	10.4	38.0
Have a secure future	HILDA W7	17.5	14.9	67.6
	NGO Survey	30.5	15.3	54.2
Job is complex and difficult	HILDA W7	43.4	16.6	40.1
	NGO Survey	18.4	11.9	69.6
Variety of interesting things to do	HILDA W7	23.2	18.5	58.3
	NGO Survey	8.7	10.9	80.4
Don't have enough time to do everything	HILDA W7	40.5	17.3	42.3
	NGO Survey	19.5	14	66.6

Education and professional development

Post-school qualifications

Respondents appear to have high levels of post school qualifications. Just under one in ten respondents (9.8 percent) had no post-school qualification. 61.1 percent of respondents had a university degree or higher. 16.9 percent of respondents with tertiary qualifications had a degree or higher in Social Work. Overall 36.4 percent of the total sample had completed a degree or higher in another human service field. An equivalent number of respondents (36.8 percent) reported having completed a TAFE qualification in a human service field.

The highest proportions of university educated workers were found in peak bodies (88.4 percent), followed by 75.6 percent in cultural services (migrant service and/or Aboriginal community program) and 70.5 percent in community-based health. The lowest proportion of university educated workers were found in employment, finance and emergency relief (38.5 percent) followed by housing and legal services (51.3 percent) and community based ageing and disability care (55.5 percent).

Qualified workers in the sample tended to have received post-school qualifications relatively recently. Just under a third (29.5 percent) had completed their most recent post-school qualification in the past 2 years with over half (56.2 percent) having completed their qualifications in the past 5 years. This could indicate a movement towards professionalization in the sector but could also indicate a sector with a high proportion of fairly recent graduates with limited experience.

Current study patterns

Twenty-six percent of the sample reported being currently enrolled in a program of study. Levels of study by these NGO workers are higher than those in the broader NSW workforce, with 16.4 percent of workers in HILDA reportedly studying.

The majority of NGO respondents who were studying were studying for a TAFE qualification in human services (34.7 percent). Thirty-eight percent were studying for a university degree in either social work (10.2 percent) or in another human service field (27.7 percent).

Conferences and seminars

Respondents indicated a high level of access to professional development opportunities via conference attendance and training through their employer. In the overall sample, 84.6 percent of workers attended a conference in the past 12 months. No sub-sector had less than 77 percent of respondents reporting having attended a conference in the past 12 months. Workers in child, family and youth were the most likely to have attended a conference (89.3 percent), followed by workers in cultural services (87.8 percent) and peak bodies (87.2 percent).

In addition, 76.8 percent of the overall sample had attended some form of employer funded training, which compares favourably with the figure of 30.0 percent in the wider NSW workforce, as indicated by HILDA. NGO workers reported having spent an average 7 days at training courses over the past 12 months.

Supervision

The literature review highlighted supervision as a key factor which contributes to job satisfaction, development of expertise, and retention of workers in community services. Supervision appears to be limited in non-government community services. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they had supervision once a month or more. Almost one in ten respondents (9.4 percent) indicated they had supervision less than once per year. Respondents in Community-based health services were most likely to have supervision once a month or more (73.6 percent) followed by 70.8 percent in Child, Family and Youth services. Those working in peak bodies (51.2 percent), housing and legal services (53.6 percent), and community based ageing and disability services (54.3 percent) were the least likely to have a supervision meeting at least once a month.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the main purposes of their most recent supervision meetings. The most common purposes were sharing ideas about dealing with complex situations, debriefing or helping respondents cope with their work, and assessing performance or setting performance goals. The results differed according to the amount of time respondents spent in frontline service provision. As shown in Table 21, respondents' perceptions of the purpose of supervision differed according to whether workers spent more than 20 percent of their time in frontline provision. For those spending less time in frontline provision, talking about or planning for organisational change, and talking about relationships with other staff or agencies featured in the top five issues discussed. Those spending more time in frontline

provision talked about management and caseloads, and ways to improve the work performed.

Table 21 Purpose of last supervisory meeting by level of frontline provision, top 5 issues

Spends less than 20% of time in frontline provision	Spends more than 20% of time in frontline provision
Share ideas about dealing with complex situations	Share ideas about dealing with complex situations
Talk about or plan for organizational change	Debrief or help you cope with your work
Assess your performance or set performance goals	Talk about management and caseloads
Debrief or help you cope with your work	Talk about ways to improve your work
Talk about relationships with other staff or agencies	Assess your performance or set of performance goals

Professional development in the form of talking about or planning for longer term career goals was further down the list for both frontline staff and those spending less than 20 percent of their time in frontline provision.

Career history and intentions

Previous job

The most notable dynamic is movement within the NGO sector. Fifty-five percent of respondents (1,359) had come to their current job from a previous job in community services. Of this group, more than half (773 respondents or 56.8 percent) reported that their previous job was with a different NGO employer. One fifth (20.0 percent) reported having moved to their current job from another position within the same NGO. Movement of workers from government organizations to the NGO sector is more limited but still substantial, with 18 percent reporting entering their current job from a local, state or federal government (primarily state government) role in community services.

Intention to leave

Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that they would voluntarily or involuntarily leave their jobs in the next 12 months. Eight hundred and two respondents (or 40 percent of the 1,906 people who answered the question) indicated that there was a 20 percent or higher chance they will voluntarily leave their current job within the next 12 months. The mean percentage chance reported by respondents was 24.6, only slightly higher than the mean estimate of 22.9% made by HILDA respondents.

Higher proportions felt they may involuntarily lose their job in the next 12 months. Despite high proportions of respondents who reported they were employed in an ongoing or permanent capacity, 36.8 percent felt that they had a 20 percent or higher chance of losing their job in the next year. NGO workers estimated that on average, they had a 19.4 percent chance of losing their job in the next year, higher than the

estimate of 12.4 in HILDA (although the economy had downturned between the HILDA and NGO survey periods).

Job search in last 4 weeks

More telling is the proportion of workers who had looked for another job in the last 4 weeks. 32.3 percent of respondents had looked for another job in the four weeks previous to being surveyed, compared with only 14.3 percent in the wider workforce, as indicated by HILDA. However, these workers are unlikely to be lost to community services or to NGO organisations. Forty-one percent indicated a commitment to staying in the community services, having only looked for work in community services. Thirty-one percent of job seekers were looking for another job in the NGO sector, although a higher proportion, 44.4 percent of job seekers, reported having looked for a job in a Local, State or Federal Government organization. In terms of the reasons for leaving, the most common was retirement, reflecting the ageing of this workforce, with other common reasons being pay, the nature of the work, and opportunities for career advancement.

Working intentions for the future

As workforce retention is a concern for the capacity and longer term sustainability of the NGO workforce, respondents were asked about their intentions for work in five years. More than half (56.8 percent) of respondents indicated they intend to work in community services in five years. A high proportion of respondents hope to stay in the NGO sector, with 40.8 percent indicating they intend to work in an NGO in five years time. However, only 29.2 percent of respondents indicated their intention to remain with their current organization in five years time which may indicate that while there is some stability within community services, there may be a considerable turnover (or churning) of workers as they move through organisations, and between the NGO and other sectors.

Perceptions of NGO, government and other organisations

Workers career intentions are shaped by their perceptions of the strengths and attractive features of different types of organisations. Respondents were asked to rate whether non-government, government, or for-profit organisations offered the best opportunities, or whether there was no difference. This indicates some of the perceived strengths of NGO work, and the main factors likely to retain workers in the NGO sector or attract them into the government sector.

The findings are summarised in Table 20.

Table 22 Perceptions of opportunities in NGO and government organisations

NGOs offer the best:	Government organisations offer the best:
Opportunities to make a difference in the community	Pay
Opportunities to achieve the best client outcomes	Job security and continuity
Opportunities to build relationships with clients	Employment conditions and entitlements
Flexible work arrangements	Training & professional development opportunities
Opportunities to use you own judgment	Opportunities for career advancement
Opportunities to work closely with staff	Occupational health and safety
Opportunities to collaborate across agencies	
Organisational climate that nurtures diversity	
Recognition for doing a good job	

As was also found in the focus groups (see Section 5), respondents believed they had more opportunity to make a difference in the community in NGOs (66 percent compared with only 7 percent who believed government organisations offered the best opportunities). Fifty-eight percent believed that working in an NGO gave them better opportunities to achieve the best outcomes for clients (compared with 8.8 percent who rated this as the strength of the government sector). Sixty-eight percent of respondents also believed that NGOs offered better opportunities to build relationships with clients, compared with only 7.2 percent in government.

These workers also had positive perceptions of the work cultures of NGOs compared with government organizations. For example 50.1 percent believed that arrangements for flexible work were better in NGOs. Sixty-three percent believed that NGOs gave them more opportunities to exercise their judgment compared with just 5.5 percent who believed government jobs would do so. Relationships between staff and across agencies were also considered to be better facilitated by NGOs with 51.3 percent of respondents believing that they had better opportunities to work closely with other staff and 55.2 percent believing they had better opportunities to collaborate across organizations in NGOs. 50.5 percent of respondents perceived NGOs as being more likely to have an organizational climate that nurtures diversity (15.6 percent thought government was better at this). Forty-one percent of respondents also thought that they were more likely to get recognition for doing a good job in an NGO compared with 10.8 percent in government organizations.

NGO workers perceived government organizations to provide better conditions of employment in the way of pay, job security and career paths. As these factors relate to workers' material rewards and conditions, these beliefs are likely to act as powerful incentives for workers to move out of the NGO sector. The data indicates 67.2 percent of respondents perceive pay to be better in government organizations. 70.4 percent perceived government organizations to provide better job security and continuity and 72.6 percent thought employment conditions and entitlements overall were better in government organizations.

The survey data also indicated that 51.0 percent of respondents thought government organizations provided better training and professional development and 57.9 percent also thought that there were more opportunities for career advancement in government organizations. A lack of opportunities for career development in NGOs

has also been identified in the literature, and in the qualitative data presented in the following sections.

Conclusions

While there are limitations relating to the sampling frame and distribution methods which mean the survey should not be considered perfectly representative, the findings provide new evidence about NGO workers' characteristics, their working conditions and experiences, and labour dynamics in the sector – evidence which highlights key challenges affecting the sector, and suggests strategies for reform.

In terms of workers' characteristics, respondents were older, more likely to be female, more likely to be ATSI, and less likely to be born overseas than the wider NSW workforce. The age and gender profile of the workforce may make it less attractive for younger people and for men, and smaller proportions of overseas born workers may compromise the capacity of the workforce to serve CALD populations.

In terms of working conditions, the NGO sample contained high proportions of part time workers, especially in child, family and youth services, housing and legal services, community based health, and multi-service agencies. Correspondingly, multiple job holding is also common in the sample. While there is some apparent preference for part time work, almost a third of part time workers reported that working part time was all that was offered. The extent of part time work in the sector may act as a disincentive for some workers, especially for men.

Compared with the broader workforce, NGO respondents appear to have higher levels of access to paid annual and sick leave, although there are also higher proportions spending time on workers compensation, and for longer than other workers in NSW. NGO respondents also report higher levels of access to flexible and family friendly working arrangements. However, rates of access to paid maternity leave were poor, with 26.2 percent of NGO workers reporting access to paid maternity leave compared with 51.9 percent in the wider workforce. Improving maternity leave provisions, especially through the SACS award, is thus an important strategy for retaining female workers of childbearing age in the NGO sector.

Respondents were highly dissatisfied with their pay, despite opportunities to salary sacrifice 'big ticket' living expenses such as mortgage or rent payments, credit cards, superannuation and motor vehicles. The NGO sample also reported being less satisfied with their job security, and more likely than other workers to feel their jobs were stressful, complex and time pressured than other workers in NSW. In terms of supports for professional development, these NGO workers reported higher levels of conference and seminar attendance, and employer funded training, than other workers in NSW.

In terms of labour dynamics, the most notable dynamic is movement within the NGO sector itself, with most workers having moved into their current job from a different NGO employer, or from another job in their current organisation. Almost a fifth of NGO respondents came to their job from government (mostly state) organisations, and there was minimal movement into the NGO sector from private for-profits.

In terms of career intentions, almost a third of workers had looked for a job in the last four weeks (compared to only 14.3 percent of workers in HILDA). The largest

proportion was looking for work in a local, state or federal government organisation (44.4 percent). While only 29.2 percent of respondents intend to remain with their current organisation in five years, a higher proportion reported intent to remain in an NGO (40.8 percent), again reflecting that the most notable dynamic is churning within the NGO sector itself.

Career intentions are shaped by workers' perceptions of employment opportunities in NGOs, government and for-profit organisations. Although respondents felt NGOs offered the best opportunities to make a difference, achieve outcomes for clients, build relationships with clients and with staff in other agencies, and exercise judgment, government organisations were perceived to provide better conditions of employment in the way of pay, job security, career paths and professional development. Thus, while NGOs offer benefits relating to the nature of work and workplace cultures, the material conditions offered by the government sector act as powerful incentives for workers to move. This factor is explored further in the focus groups and stakeholder interviews reported in the following sections.

5 Focus groups with workers

5.1 Methodology and design

In addition to the workforce survey reported in Section 4 and the stakeholder interviews reported in Section 6, seven focus group interviews were also conducted with non-government community service workers and students. The aims of these interviews were to examine workers experiences in the community services sector, their occupational needs, and ideas for sectoral reform. The focus group interviews complemented other methodologies employed for this project and facilitated a deeper exploration of issues arising from the literature review, workforce survey, and stakeholder interviews. The focus groups provided deeper insight into how non-government workers think about the work that they do and careers in community services; how they make career-related decisions; their motivations for leaving or remaining in particular jobs; and their perceptions of the non-government sector in relation to work in other types of organisations. The focus groups also helped to deepen understanding of worker perspectives and experiences across urban and regional locations, and in different community service industries.

The recruitment method employed for workers was to send an invitational email to all NGO Workforce Survey respondents who, after completing the survey, indicated interest in participating further in the research project. Invitations were sent approximately half way through the survey data collection period. In total, 737 survey respondents were sent invitational emails. The email invited participants to attend a focus group in one of six chosen locations. The sampling limitations of the survey discussed in the previous section therefore similarly affect the sub-sample of focus group participants. Additionally, the researchers observed a sampling bias towards participants who expressed a high level of commitment to the NGO sector. For these participants, the motivation to attend the focus groups was the opportunity to voice their concerns and suggest ways to address workforce challenges.

The focus group sites were located in south-east Sydney (2 different sites); south-west Sydney, western Sydney, inner-city and a regional location to the north of Sydney. To facilitate exploration of issues related to community service workers in general, and those of specific sub-groups, the focus groups were designed to comprise both general cohort representatives and those from two specific sub-sectors: child, youth and family welfare; and disability services. Focus group interviews at four sites (south east, south west, inner city and regional NSW) comprised a general cohort of community service workers, and at two other sites focus group interviews were for distinct sub-samples of workers. Workers from the child, family and youth sector were invited to attend an inner city focus group and those from the disability sector were invited to attend a western Sydney focus group.

In addition, a focus group interview was held with students at a TAFE College. This focus group was conducted to explore students' motivations for entering the sector, their career plans, and perceptions of preparedness and future work in the community services sector. Final year students about to complete courses in youth work, community services work, community welfare work, alcohol and other drugs work, and mental health work were recruited to this focus group by invitational posters that were placed on student notice boards. This structure of four 'general population'

groups and three sub-sample groups facilitated some comparative analysis, and this is detailed below.

Table 23 Focus group summary information

	Location	Cohort Type	Participant Numbers	Participants' Services/Roles
Group 1	South-west Sydney	General cohort	7 (5 female, 2 male)	Coordinator/Counsellor, Stolen Generation support services; Worker, CALD services; Youth worker; Housing manager, community housing; Community service development officer, Disability services; CEO Community Services organisation; Employment consultant;
Group 2	Western Sydney	Disability services	4 (3 male, 1 female)	Quality and Policy Manager, Disability services; Manager, Disability Family Support Services; Manager, Children's respite services; Disability support worker.
Group 3	Inner-city	Child, family and youth services	6 (4 male, 2 female).	Family Support Services, manager; Women's advocate, inner-city Legal Service; Youth Support Network case-manager; Local community centre worker (3).
Group 4	South-east Sydney	General cohort	9 (7 female, 2 male)	Aboriginal family worker; Domestic violence project officer; Family Worker; Youth worker, crisis accommodation; Caseworker, HIV Support; Coordinator, aged and disability support services; Manager, volunteer recruitment training service; Coordinator, Disability support service;
Group 5	South-east Sydney	General cohort	6 (4 female, 2 male)	Workers, tenants advocacy service (2); Worker, community forum; Coordinator, food distribution network; Outreach worker, Youth services; Coordinator; Intellectual disability support service
Group 6	Regional	General cohort	6 (4 female, 2 male)	Caseworker for homeless youth; Regional Manager large NGO; Manager, Housing Association; HACC worker (2); Manager, Volunteer Centre;
Group 7	TAFE	Students	6 (3 female, 3 male)	Students of youth work, community services work, community welfare work, alcohol and other drugs work, and mental health work.

The focus groups were guided by a schedule of questions which prompted much group discussion and interaction between participants, with many enthusiastically sharing stories about their work-lives (see Appendix A for full focus group interview schedule). Participant numbers in the focus groups ranged from 4 to 9, with an average of 6 participants at each group. The composition of groups varied, and included community service workers undertaking a diversity of roles in community housing, employment services, youth work, disability services, women's advocacy services, legal services, child and family welfare, juvenile justice, drug and alcohol services, and services for indigenous Australians. The qualifications of participants varied and included those with TAFE certificates in various community service fields and those with various university degrees (such as psychology, law, social work), and those with no directly related educational qualifications who had joined the sector after working in other fields of employment (such as teaching, engineering, hospitality, finance and banking). Some participants had many years of experience in

community service work and others had started work in the last 12 months. Section 5.2 below provides an overview of each group conducted.

The gender bias of more female participants (59 percent women and 41 percent men) reflects the fact that the NSW community services workforce is largely female, however, the difference is not as great as that for survey respondents (83 percent female). Forty percent of focus group participants were either managers or coordinators, as were 40 percent of survey respondents. Finally, five focus group participants identified as indigenous with one formally employed at an indigenous NGO, one as an Aboriginal family support worker, and 3 others who were informally connected to a non-government agency located in the inner-city.

Each focus group discussion lasted approximately 1.5 hours. With participants' consent, the focus groups were recorded and audio files were transcribed for detailed analysis. Using NVivo 8, transcripts were coded according to a coding scheme that enabled identification of core issues arising from the literature as well as issues brought up by participants themselves. Analysis of focus group data identified the following overarching categories: community services subsectors; characteristics of both students and workers; workforce challenges; and strategies for reform.

5.2 Community Service Workers

A shared commitment to helping clients

The focus group data indicate that despite the fragmented nature of the community services sector, the diversity of jobs in community service work and the different types of people who participated in the focus groups, participants did share some group norms and cultural values. This finding suggests the existence of a shared occupational culture despite the multiple contexts of community service work. Central to this culture is workers' commitment to helping others and their desire to 'make a difference in people's lives' – a phrase that is central to the discourse of community service workers:

One of the benefits is the face to face work we are doing – we can see the difference we are making (Group 1).

It's about bringing about a change (Group 3).

It's an inspiring sector, you feel that you make a difference in people's lives (Group 3).

Central to the discourse of 'making a difference' is the understanding that community service workers also benefit from the type of work that they do:

Previously I was in HR and finance [and] after September 11 I realised that I didn't want to spend my life doing that anymore. I wanted to do a job that made me feel good, that I was contributing, that I felt worthwhile... I think helping people does that but it was about me as well (Group 6).

I realised there was a niche that I like, and that is with people, and it is building a bridge and reaching into someone else's world and being able to communicate with them because they are not changing but you can make a

bridge so their world can be a more open space... and we actually do it where we are, we communicate with people at the welfare centres and we keep them in a normal stream of life and it is super rewarding in itself (Group 6).

When probed further, it became clear that it was the satisfaction derived from helping and interacting with clients that workers enjoyed most about their jobs. This is an important point as it suggests that frontline workers who are promoted into management positions with no face-to-face client contact may become dissatisfied with their work.

Labour dynamics

A key component of an analysis of labour dynamics in the NGO sector is to understand the perceptions that workers hold, perceptions which reflect and influence their preferences for their future careers. These perceptions reflect the variety of push and pull factors that different sets of workers consider when making career choices. What some workers see as advantageous about work in the NGO sector can be a disadvantage for a worker at a different stage in their life or with a different level of qualifications. The stories participants tell point to areas in need of redress in order to maintain workforce capacity and quality.

In comparison with conditions in government organisations there was a perception amongst participants that NGOs were less bound by rigid bureaucratic structures and therefore offered greater flexibility for workers – *“I found that in the local government I was working for - yes there were some great projects I was working on but it took a very long time to get them off the ground because there were so many levels to get through” (Group 4).*

Many focus group participants had previously worked in the government sector and had since left because they felt disconnected from what had driven them to accept the job in the first place – that is, their desire to respond to the needs of vulnerable people and contribute to the creation of a more socially just society. Some participants felt that there was less opportunity to do this within the government sector:

I guess what I like about working in a community based non-government organization is the capacity to respond quickly to community needs, there is no red tape, nor the hierarchy and the bureaucracy. We have to provide programs and listen to what the community wants and to find a way to address that within the capacity... And I have worked for DoCS and that creative freedom to be able to work like that does not exist in government agencies (Group 3).

For those workers who felt passionate about advocating on behalf of their clients, there was a perception that NGOs offered greater independence and autonomy to be critical and to stand up against injustice. In another participants words –

I think when working for an NGO there is more movement and flexibility in speaking up about the rights of the people I am working with, whereas if I was working for DoCS, my boss is ultimately the government and so to create change in advocacy and advocating for clients in that way I think is more difficult (Group 5).

The data indicates that the working conditions that attracted workers to join, stay and/or rejoin the NGO sector varied according to age and life circumstances. For many workers the flexibility and autonomy discussed above came at a trade-off. In particular, for middle aged workers with significant family and financial commitments, there is a perception that work in an NGO means sacrificing pay, job security and career path – all benefits deemed to be available in government organisations –

You have people with our skill set earning 15-20 thousand dollars up to 30 thousand dollars more and 15.4 per cent superannuation as opposed to the community sector which is 9 per cent (Group 5).

It is also the low pay with a high level of responsibility. I took a pay cut for going from a government policy maker to a manager of an organisation (Group 1).

There is more security in the government sector (Group 5).

For some, the alignment of their values with that of the NGO sector meant they were willing to take lower pay and conditions and avoid the kind of bureaucracy associated with working for government. However a sustainable industry is not assured on this basis. For many prime age workers, their family and financial commitments do not allow them to make this sacrifice and some feel that at some point they will have to compromise their values for the better pay and conditions available in the public sector. – *“My heart absolutely says NGOs 100% but my wallet says the government so it is always a dilemma” (Group 3).*

For some workers this dilemma was made more acute because of the perceived dichotomy between government workers who were seen as concerned with their own conditions and NGO workers who were seen as concerned with the wellbeing of their clients –

One thing I noticed by working closely with government departments is that some of them have the mentality of what they can get out of a job, their flex days, their entitlements... and of course we don't have those same entitlements so there is more of a care factor (Group 3).

For those workers with years of experience but without relevant qualifications, there was a perception that the NGO sector provided more opportunities in comparison to government organisations which excluded them because they didn't have *“the piece of paper”*. As one participant said –

With this sector, what I found is there is a lot of opportunity there as long as you do your job. There is a lot more flexibility (Group 4).

From a managers perspective this had advantages too –

We are interviewing on Monday and we have got seven applicants and there are a range of people with diplomas, people with degrees and masters and it is not going to be dependent on their qualifications, it is going to be dependent on what they offer and what they have experienced and I guess that is one of

the biggest differences in government, unless you have a degree you don't get a look in (Group 4).

This however could prove to be a disadvantage to retaining qualified staff who were looking for a career path that gave recognition of their qualifications. As one participant explained it, he felt that in government organisations there was “*more recognition of training and studying, paid study leave and I think also a career path which is something we don't have in the community sector*” (Group 5). A similar perception that NGOs offered a lack of support for attaining qualifications was expressed by a regional participant – “*in the government organisation I had no trouble getting study leave and I didn't feel guilty or bad about taking that leave to study at a higher level. But non-government organisations – I don't even ask*” (Group 6).

In addition to pay, there was a perception that it was the issue of qualifications that distinguish NGO workers and government workers – “*I have seen the divide between community based workers and government – particularly DoCS workers and I think that is probably because they are very well qualified and they are very well paid so that sets that divide*” (Group 3). This had ramifications for the labour dynamics of young workers and given the ageing demographic of the NGO sector, this is one cohort whose needs require greater attention if they are to be recruited and retained in the NGO workforce. There was some tension apparent in the data between the student focus group and the perceptions of older workers about what young people should be doing. The data collected in the student focus group indicated that they were largely unaware of the differences between working in an NGO compared with working for the government. The older workers however perceived distinct patterns of youth participation in the NGO sector.

There was a perception that some younger participants who had commenced work in the NGO sector were keen to join the government sector, and were either waiting for the next government recruitment round, or were currently in the process of applying for a position in a government agency. As one supervisor of students on placement reported - “*Most of them do have aspirations to work in the government sector and I think that is because of the benefits, entitlements, opportunities, money, security and career paths; they could keep their job and travel*” (Group 3). One young worker confirmed what she felt was an attitude amongst her peers that “*You study while you go to NGOs and as soon as you get your degree you go somewhere else*” (Group 5). In general, there was a perception that for young workers, NGOs provided good experience and training which could then be transferred into better pay and conditions in the government sector – “*My advice to them is to do a couple of years in a community based organisation before you embark*” (Group 3). Such movement between the sectors suggests that the training of staff should be considered a shared responsibility.

Many older participants had commenced work in community services in the NGO sector, left to work for a government agency after having gained experience and some training, and then returned to the NGO sector as a more experienced worker. For these workers there was a perception that to some degree their age mediated some of the disadvantages of NGO work and allowed them to benefit from the more positive aspects - “*At my age I am not looking for a heap of money, I am looking at extending my working career in an area that I have a passion for so there are far greater*

opportunities for me in the NGO sector” (Group 2). However for some older workers who have spent their working life in the sector there was a considerable toll - “I am nearly 60 and I have never had long service leave” (Group 5).

The culture of commitment and altruism of NGO workers in the sector must be interpreted as a major strength and a quality that cannot be easily replicated. In order to maintain a quality and sustainable sector, appropriate institutional supports are required.

Qualifications and training

Participants at the focus group interviews included workers with no formal qualifications, those who had undertaken sector specific courses at TAFE, and those with tertiary qualifications. Indeed, the diversity in degrees, qualifications and training courses undertaken by participants reflects the diversity of qualifications that exist throughout the sector. In discussions of qualifications, workers repeatedly made statements about the value of some workers who had no formal qualifications but instead drew on their life experiences to help vulnerable clients:

A lot of good community workers have come into [the industry] quite late and so may not have the required qualifications but are doing brilliant work (Group 3).

This perhaps explains why there were no calls from workers to introduce minimum qualification levels into the sector, even though such a move would add to the professional status of community service workers. Some participants obviously valued practical knowledge and experience over theoretical knowledge.

Some participants commented that they would like to undertake further training and education but that their work precluded this possibility. It seemed apparent that workers in larger NGOs were given more opportunity to engage in further study:

When I started with ___ I had a youth work diploma through TAFE so I finished that and I am actually doing a communications degree now. But again I am able to do that because the [organization] gives me that opportunity (Group 3).

Participants suggested that organizations increase opportunities for ongoing education and training. This would include providing financial support for workers with no directly relevant post-school qualification who wish to attain tertiary qualifications, as well as those who would like to attend short courses. Participants reported that there is a need to strengthen relationships between the community services sector and the educational sector and training organisations to ensure that potential workers are prepared for the realities of work in the sector. Training also needs to be provided to strengthen the skills of workers who have been identified as potential leaders:

In the non-government sector I think certainly at the coal face that there is lots of training available and there are also traineeships which also come through funding again however, when you move up into management level there is nothing (Group 6).

Despite the call amongst workers for greater access to training, the data indicates that NGOs make a considerable contribution to the community services sector through training inexperienced personnel who may leave the NGO sector once they have obtained some experience and additional skills.

5.3 Workforce challenges: factors that threaten the motivation and commitment of workers

The capacity and sustainability of the NGO community services sector to deliver quality services and meet the needs of clients depends on it attracting and retaining skilled workers. In the following section the key workforce challenges associated with the sector are examined. The section begins with a discussion of funding policy and programs as inadequate funding has wide-sweeping consequences for the sector.

Funding policy and programs

Inadequate funding was a repetitive theme in focus group interviews, with many participants asserting that their organisations' current levels of funding do not reflect the expenditure required to provide quality services, appropriately remunerate staff, and invest in workforce development initiatives. Workers from two larger NGO's reported that their organisations had commercial operations that provided alternative revenue streams, however, the vast majority of organisations represented were solely dependent upon local, state and federal government funding. Participants reported that inadequate funding impacted on service delivery in two key ways: it compromised the quality of services delivered and the conditions for staff:

We recently moved offices and I literally have to fight with every organisation saying that you have a responsibility to fund for infrastructure (Group 1).

Funding is just for delivery of service, which is why most community service providers don't train staff (Group 1).

Another identified problem was that funding agreements often contained regulatory clauses that tied organisations to rigid service models. Some participants felt that these limited the extent to which workers could genuinely respond to the needs of clients:

Too many boundaries, they are not flexible enough. It's important to be able to deal with issues that come our way.

I agree, we are funded to provide services only to kids from 0-8 but what about older siblings? (Group 3)

Another participant gave an example of government funding policy that undermined professionalization efforts within the sector, specifically, important sectoral advances in increasing the qualifications of workers and improving their professional status:

With our next tender, the job descriptions have changed which is going to have a lot of issues for hiring. The government is requiring just generic workers which reduces the quality of our workforce (Group 3).

Workers resisted what they felt were efforts by government to make the NGO sector an extension of government service provision. They felt that the strength of the NGO

sector was based in its lack of bureaucracy and its ability to respond quickly and creatively to client needs.

Many participants reported that some flexibility in both funding and service delivery models was necessary to allow for factors such as changes in demand and identified problems.

A number of participants at each focus group (with the exception of the student group) indicated that their funding arrangements were about to expire and that they had to re-tender for continued funding. Many workers expressed a high level of uncertainty in relation to job security, with many anticipating changed working conditions under new contracts:

Right now I'm in a good position because I'm in the community legal centre and our work conditions and pay are usually better. We are paid above award and have better benefits, however, that's going to change soon because the contract is out for tender and that will result in redundancies. Some workers will [also] have to take a pay cut (Group 3).

Many participants also commented on a noticeable shift in funding policy and programs towards quantifiable output targets. Some felt that this direction hampered the ability of workers to respond to clients' needs:

I want the government to recognize that this is human services and there are complexities in that. The focus should be on humans rather than outputs (Group 1).

Government agencies are a lot more concerned about data collection and sometimes you feel that you are in a feeding process – feeding through a lot of data, and sometimes you wonder how much are you doing for the client (Group 3).

Some participants spoke of the stress associated with having to reach output targets. The short term nature of funding programs was also identified as a factor that led to increased instability within the sector:

Another downside is the funding. A lot of our projects only have a three year term. That makes it difficult to manage. Half way through the project workers have to think about their careers, and managers have to think about winding down the project which is difficult (Group 3).

Finally, some participants reported that the administrative and reporting requirements of government funding contracts were an onerous burden that impacted on their ability to provide face-to-face services to clients. In many organisations, funding was sought from multiple programs and agencies, and participants reported a lack of consistency in regards to accountability and reporting requirements.

Pay

Inadequate levels of funding impact on the pay of community service workers. Focus group data indicate that workers were extremely dissatisfied with what they

considered to be low levels of pay – especially when considered in relation to government agency colleagues who performed similar work:

Right now I just quit because I know I am worth more than what I was getting paid (Group 4).

I know the reason why people don't stay around with the job is because the salary is very low (Group 2).

Sometimes I look at a position [in the job ads] and I think 'you have to be kidding me'. Too much is required for such a low pay (Group 1).

Workers were also dissatisfied with a lack of mechanisms for ongoing wage improvements, as they felt that the SACS award was inadequate and contributed to limited career progression. This situation is complicated by the fact that there is no agreed occupational classification system within the community services sector. Workers complained that this led to an inconsistent application of the award within the sector:

Community service and training award is the lowest paid sector at the moment. We need more continuity between sub-sectors. It should not be up to the organisation to decide pay. It should be an across the board, a standard pay per position (Group 1).

The ability to salary sacrifice was viewed positively by workers, although surprisingly quite a few participants at the focus groups reported that they were not taking advantage of this benefit, despite the fact that their organisations did have Public Benevolent Institution status.

Care penalties

The data collected from the focus groups indicates a care penalty for NGO workers in the community sector. The discussion highlighted challenges in two linked areas – overwork and poor remuneration and reluctance on the part of workers to demand better pay and conditions. Participants acknowledged disadvantages to working in the non-government sector – especially low levels of remuneration, but data indicates that many were prepared to accept these conditions for the intrinsic rewards associated with 'making a difference' to clients lives. Some comments indicated that the desire to help others and create a more just society sustained workers, and perhaps ameliorated the effects of difficult working conditions. As reported by focus group participants, these difficult conditions included 'controlling' management committees, unceasing performance reviews, the impermanent nature of some workers' jobs, low levels of remuneration despite high levels of responsibility, and limited career path and mentoring opportunities. Community service workers in smaller organisations appeared to be the most disadvantaged in regards to these latter conditions, with fewer opportunities for promotion, and less flexibility.

The agreement between participants at the focus groups indicated that these conditions were shared by many, yet (unlike in the survey) very few participants indicated that they were searching for another job. It seemed apparent to researchers that low pay was an accepted occupational norm. Some workers expressed resentment

at the fact that colleagues in the government sector were paid significantly more to do similar work, yet not one worker stated that they were actively seeking to change this reality through industrial campaigning or any other measure. Indeed, there was a sense of resignation amongst workers to the current working conditions.

There was a belief amongst some workers, however, that their service ethic was being exploited by their organisation and government agencies:

I think there is that exploitation of that natural warmth to help people, to care about the community, care about the clients, care about the work. That can be exploited and this is exploited by government in the level of salaries and the funding cuts (Group 5).

Participant 1: It's all the overtime that we do without getting paid. I take my work home on the weekend.

Participant 2: That's not what we should be doing because they rely on that.

Participant 1: Yes but we do it for the clients not for management and for ourselves – to decrease our workload during normal hours. There is no point for me to have a day off or a holiday because then the work piles up (Group 1).

The commitment [required] can sometimes overwhelm you. You stay later than you should and you do more work than you should – that is unpaid. We all accept it even though we should take better care of ourselves but generally there really isn't anybody to prevent that from happening. Each organisation has some level of hierarchy but they are under stress as well. Workers need to be better looked after (Group 3).

As indicated in the quotes above, the service ethic which motivated workers also left them vulnerable to burnout. This circumstance poses distinctive challenges for organisational management.

Some workers recognised that part of the care penalty meant that workers had difficulty in asking for better pay or conditions:

I think we need to value ourselves more and really make sure the government knows we are worth more than the government pays us. Self worth – I think that is something community workers lack in general because if they are taking the money then they are taking away from their clients and there is that real attitude of altruism and I think we need to say that we're no good if we are not going to stay here, be looked after, be healthy, be trained and be all those things the best we can be so we can offer our services the best way, so it is not taking away from the clients, it is actually giving them something and we need to get that out (Group 5).

When probed further, some workers also stated that they were prepared to accept lower wages and poorer conditions to remain in the NGO sector that they valued as being 'creative', 'non-bureaucratic', 'inspiring' and able to deliver services that are 'needed rather than dictated'. Reforms that workers viewed as undermining these core characteristics, such as government service provision contracts that rigidly prescribed program models, were opposed, and could perhaps be viewed as threatening the

motivation of workers. The motivated nature of workers, who were eager to attend evening focus groups to voice their opinions was evident to the researchers. Many participants attended focus groups which were located far from their workplace and/or home and some sent follow up emails to facilitators with extra information.

Career path

The focus group data indicates that limited career progression is an issue in the NGO workforce that may exacerbate recruitment and retention difficulties within the sector. Participants report that senior positions are limited within the sector and movement between grades can be stalled due to funding constraints. Some workers reported being 'stuck' with nowhere to go in their job:

You can be in leadership for 20 years but still be on level 5 so there is no increase besides getting the CPI index, you are not going to move so a lot of people leave. For me when I had my daughter and I stayed with the job for 8 years I was on the grade 3 year 5 so you are never going to move which is why I moved to another organization. I was back in the grade 3 but in 6 months I was on grade 4 and then we got the extra funding from the Government and I went to grade 5 so within 2 years I was up to a whole new level. But again on grade 5 and grade 6 there is only 2 years that you can go, like the awards 1-4 go up to year 5 but grade 5 and 6 only go for two years so I am in this job for another 12 months and the income won't change, and I can be in this job for 20 years and still the income will be on grade 5, year 2 (Group 2).

I have actually been told I can't go higher in my grades, there is nowhere for me to go so I have been stuck for the past two years now (Group 4).

Some participants indicated that stunted career progression created tension within the workforce which is not conducive to cooperation and collaboration. As one participant put it:

There are very few senior positions in the sector, you can be a manager for however long so there is probably about 900 people in your region that are dying for you to move on. I found there was a lot of competition, there is a lot of professional jealousy and people here are frustrated and they want to move on but can't (Group 4).

The lack of career progression in the sector restricts the opportunities for workers to develop and use their skills and limits the recognition they can receive for the exercise of these skills – *even after one year of studying and the certificate, your salary won't go up one level because they don't have the money to increase (Group 2)*. As indicated in this last quote, career pathways are not aligned with training and further education, and so there is little incentive for workers within the sector to engage in continued learning.

For some, the lack of financial recognition attached to promotion discouraged them from advancing in their careers. There was also an indication that the size of the NGO was a key variable in allowing for career progression:

It depends on the NGO – large versus small. In a large NGO there is a lot more opportunities to advance [your] career (Group 1).

While vertical progression was reportedly difficult, many participants discussed the positive benefits in having flexibility to move horizontally within organisations. As one program manager said:

If you hang around long enough in the community centres, you move places which I think is a great thing... I know with large agency X there is constant movement. If you have potential you find yourself moving into different areas of the organisation (Group 4)

Job Insecurity

The prevalence of short term employment contracts in the sector affects the ability of some workers to forge a coherent career path, as one participant stated:

It is a very insecure workforce. I have been made redundant four times because the funding was suddenly withdrawn unexpectedly with nothing to do with my work performance (Group 5).

For some participants, it was the security of their employment that factored highly in their choice of organisation:

It's not the money. I felt that my position was insecure. There was a position that came up, I applied for it and got it. I was attracted to the stability of the job and helping people - but it was more the stability (Group 1).

The insecure nature of the NGO workforce is directly linked to the short-term funding cycles of Government agencies which is discussed above. The kind of insecurity discussed in the focus groups was the insecurity of being contracted for three years or less, but the sector is also characterised by a high number of workers who are paid by the hour with no entitlements. These workers were not represented in the focus group discussions but their working conditions also need to be considered.

5.4 Workers' suggestions for reform

Policy level strategies

The most commonly repeated suggestion for reform related to the provision of funding to the sector. Focus group participants did not simply want increased levels of funding, however, but argued for changes to the tendering process, extended funding terms, and for funding to extend beyond program service delivery to include workforce development initiatives. Some felt that the tendering process that encouraged competition between NGOs was detrimental to quality service delivery. Workers felt that the tendering process and short term contracts provided little incentive for established and successful service providers to engage in workforce capacity building:

I think [the government] needs to look at what is already there and build on what is there... not bring in something new. I think that it is better to build on organisations that are already established in the community... I think we

really need to build on the strengths in our community and look at facilities like this and say how can we improve on that?... If it is working, build on it and keep going. Don't try and do it cheaper, try and do it better (Group 3).

Limit the tendering process so that you have to get to accreditation standard, and avoid short term funding so you can have an organization do some long term planning and know you have got that sustained ability to move forward (Group 3).

Funding is a big thing – to know that you have life after one year, to extend and invest in what you do and forward plan (Group 6).

In response to what some considered to be a divisive tendering process, some NGOs had engaged in efforts to create more collaborative alliances and structures:

So what I did about this was hold a meeting in my region which was 5 local government areas... and we had a good old chat about it and developed a focus called community planner and [we] tried to encourage people to sign up to a proposal to plan things in their areas, and have lead agencies and different organisations decide as a group what funding they were going to go after... In that first year I was able to sign up 10 organisations (Group 5).

Some participants also called for a government led initiative in sector regulation and accreditation that would reduce inconsistency within the sector and maintain quality standards so that private agencies offering what were viewed as poorer services were unable to undercut NGOs:

[Some private agencies] are coming in through the back door offering care with carers who are not properly training but they can grab those terrible shifts, those last minute calls. [NGOs] will often need to fall back on those agencies and say look I need someone for Sunday morning and you get the call on Saturday night (Group 2).

Participants argued that any regulatory framework should include an agreed occupational classification structure across community services, and be aligned with a restructuring of the SACS award. Workers reported examples of the ways their organisations were creative in providing better working conditions, however, participants underlined the need for an improved pay and career structure in the SACS award.

Workers were aware of an increasing shift in government agencies away from front line service delivery, and expressed resentment that NGOs were looked upon as a 'cheap alternative' in service delivery. Despite the rhetoric of partnership service delivery attached to some programs such as the Department of Community Services' early intervention program, Brighter Futures, workers felt that they were not viewed as equal partners. Many felt that restructuring of the SACS award so that there was pay parity between the government and non-government sectors would address this inequity.

Sectoral level strategies

Focus group participants proposed strategies at the sectoral level that could facilitate greater collaboration between government agencies and NGOs. Participants felt that in sharing resources to upskill workers and stretch scarce resources, both the NGO sector and government agencies would benefit:

I think we [need] access to government training. We are very lucky [in this area] as we do get access to DoCS training simply because we work with two nice people in this area. It is absolutely valuable because we can't afford the sort of training [that DoCS provides to its workers] (Group 6).

We are looking at the enterprise bargaining agreement and looking at ways to try and improve the rate of pay and try to offer benefits around travel time and travel allowances because in regional areas – all of our carers say they are not going to travel more than half an hour to visit their client because they are not getting the hours so we are looking at opportunities of partnership with similar organizations who we can then try and share the workload (Group 2).

Focus group data also indicates that there is support within the sector for the development of a strategic workforce plan. Participants argued that little long term planning was undertaken within the sector due to the short term nature of funding contracts, however, they felt that an overall plan was required. Workers were agreed that such a plan should include projected service delivery requirements but were less clear about what a plan could provide in the way of workforce development.

Some workers argued that problems with recruitment and retention stemmed from the low profile of the community services sector within society. There was a strong view amongst workers that more needed to be done in promoting careers in community services within the broader community, especially in schools. Participants felt that greater promotion of the sector was needed at the secondary school level to ensure that school leavers considered working within the sector and consequently undertook appropriate post-school qualifications:

I think there could be more speaking in schools about community organisations (Group 5).

We need ambassadors for the industry... Promoting the industry as an industry of choice (Group 1).

Another strategy proposed by participants was to target school career advisors to ensure that they understand the variety of occupations and roles available within the sector, so that they can pass this knowledge onto prospective students.

Finally, some participants suggested that the community services sector engage in a professionalisation project:

One way to reform the workers or the salaries in the NGO sector is to professionalise the sector – kind of like nurses and teachers did. So they set a bare minimum requirement, usually a tertiary qualification but it is difficult to do this in the community services sector because this undervalues life

experience, and lots of people with no qualifications are great workers with clients (Group 2).

The problematic nature of this for community services was not lost on workers – many of whom greatly valued the contribution of those without formal qualifications, and acknowledged the high cost of tertiary education:

A lot of good community workers have come into [the sector] quite late and so may not have the required qualifications but are doing brilliant work and I think they have used their life experiences and found ways to really grow within the organization (Group 3).

For a lot of workers within community organizations they don't earn a great deal of money and are having to work full time and I think the cost of further education is sometimes an obstacle (Group 3).

5.5 Conclusions

Analysis of focus group interview data provides a clear picture of community service workers needs, concerns and goals. With few exceptions, workers displayed high levels of satisfaction with the work that they do, and analysis indicates that they are highly motivated by a commitment to helping others, rather than the NGO sector as such. There was much movement of workers between the government and non-government sector, with many participants starting out in the NGO sector, moving across to the government sector, and then back into the NGO sector. Data indicates that workers are prepared to accept lower levels of remuneration and poorer working conditions for the right job – frequently described as one where they can be responsive to clients' needs, feel that they are 'making a difference' to clients' lives, and where they are relatively free from bureaucratic constraint. The data indicates though that the service ethic which motivates workers also leaves them vulnerable to burnout and thus threatens workforce sustainability. The inadequacy of government funding contracts was overwhelmingly reported to impact negatively on service delivery and staff conditions and so this feature above all threatens workforce sustainability.

Focus group participants were generally dissatisfied with their level of remuneration and felt that the SACS award was inadequate. Participants expressed concern with the increasing marketisation of community services, and with increasing ties with government agencies which some felt threatened the unique culture of NGOs.

In a policy environment in which government agencies are increasingly moving away from direct service provision, it will become increasingly difficult for the non-government community services sector to maintain service provision and meet community needs unless workforce challenges are addressed. Section 6 presents data from key stakeholder interviews. This section, like Section 7 following presents some strategies for reform.

6 Stakeholder interviews

This component involved 15 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the non-government community services sector. The aim was to explore how leaders in management and advocacy positions view workforce issues, the challenges they observe, and the strategies they feel are required to promote capacity and sustainability. As the section shows, stakeholders' perceptions broadly align with those emerging from the focus groups with workers, with interviewees similarly calling for improved funding arrangements, pay, and career paths.

6.1 Methodology and design

A list of 21 possible interviewees was compiled from public records of people in leadership positions in organisations involved in supporting, developing, planning and advocating around workforce issues in the non-profit sector in NSW. The list, which incorporated suggestions from members of the project advisory group, was purposively designed to include stakeholders from across community service sub-industries, including child and family welfare, disability, homelessness, youth services and mental health as well as from multi-service agencies. The list was also designed to include stakeholders involved in rural and remote areas as well as those in metropolitan and regional centres.

Fifteen interviewees agreed to participate. Of these, 7 respondents were male and 8 were female. They included leaders of peak bodies, unions and professional bodies, and service managers and co-ordinators with responsibility for workforce matters, and extensive experience in the community services industry. Many were involved in a combination of management and advocacy roles, some were involved in providing training, and some provided management advice, including on workforce issues, throughout the non-government sector.

Questions explored how stakeholders perceive the profile of the community services workforce; the strengths of the non-government sector; the main workforce issues and challenges affecting non-government agencies; and how the non-government community services workforce can best be supported and sustained. A copy of the questioning route is at Appendix B.

Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and an hour and a half, with most taking between 30 and 45 minutes. Five interviews were undertaken in person with the remainder taking place over the phone. All were conducted between late March and late April 2009. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically, to draw out the recurring issues, points of agreement, and any interesting points of difference among interviewees.

6.2 Findings

Perceptions of the NGO workforce

Participants were asked to describe the kinds of staff that work in their agency, or in agencies over which they had responsibility, such as member agencies (in the case of peak bodies). Importantly, participants pointed out how the NGO workforce is not just comprised of frontline carers, but also includes administrative staff, policy and research staff, managers and others in a range of occupations. Participants pointed to the female dominated nature of the workforce, and to the part time nature of many

positions. Indeed, some identified trends towards shorter number of hours in some organisations, where agencies were responding to funding pressures by paying staff for fewer hours.

Perceptions were mixed about the implications of the age structure of the NGO workforce. In family services, the NGO workforce was described as mature age, with many 'long termers' now on the brink of retirement acting as mentors for new workers. In contrast, in mental health, youth and accommodation services, interviewees described NGOs employing workers who they considered relatively young, and indeed who were younger than those perceived to work in equivalent public sector positions. Others reported that young people were not choosing to work in non-government community services, while still others felt that younger workers who were entering the field were bringing more formal education but less life and work experience, increasing the need for mentoring and supervision. For frontline delivery, TAFE qualified workers were seen as better prepared through their placements, whereas university qualified people were seen to have strong theoretical knowledge but often were perceived to be uncomfortable with the realities of working with challenging client populations. Lower than optimal numbers of Aboriginal workers in the sector was identified as an issue. Aboriginal workers were perceived to be concentrated in programs specifically serving Aboriginal people, with few working in more generalist services.

In terms of skill levels, interviewees described how workers range from those with no qualifications, to those who are highly qualified, and that often, a mix of trained and untrained people work together, alongside each other. Qualifications were described that vary greatly, with disability carers, refuge workers or emergency relief workers for example tending not to have tertiary qualifications or to have Certificate IV level qualifications from TAFE, while caseworkers in other areas tended to have degrees, and others, for example in policy and research positions, having postgraduate qualifications. Notwithstanding the diversity, Certificate IV level qualifications were considered an appropriate minimum overall, and interviewees considered degree level qualifications in social work to be the key professional qualification for the sector.

While most participants focused on the demographics and skill levels of workers, others described the NGO workforce as underpaid, stressed and poorly recognised, foreshadowing key themes which both reflected the findings emerging from focus groups and the NGO workforce survey, and which emerged again in the stakeholder interviews in response to subsequent interview questions.

Perceptions of 'good' workers

Interview participants were asked to identify the characteristics and capabilities of good workers, as a way to help identify the range of skills and attributes seen as 'ideal' in the field, and which should be nurtured to support workforce quality.

Most pointed to skills of self-confidence and communication, including listening, showing empathy and compassion, as these skills enabled workers to understand the perspective of their clients. However, 'soft' communication skills needed to be finely attuned to the context of work with disadvantaged people, ideally through a combination of training, practice and supervision. One interviewee described how a good worker would have:

the capacity to get underneath what they're saying to what they're really feeling and thinking and meaning. Most people don't get those skills

without training... its training and practice and supervision that brings that about” (Interview 8)

Among the group, interviewees presented some mixed perspectives about the relative importance of training on the one hand, and life experience and personal attributes on the other. Some emphasised the importance of a particular personal disposition over training in developing good workers:

It is not a skill set you are trained in but to be an effective worker you have to be open and receptive and not judging (Interview 1)

On the basis that formal qualifications cannot substitute for the skills developed through life experience and practical understanding of obligations under funding agreements, another was critical of credentials and theoretical knowledge in community services work, stating that:

I am just not stuck on loading people up with diplomas and theoretical knowledge (Interview 6)

Others also emphasised life experience, particularly adverse experiences which provided them with personal resources that informed how they engaged with clients:

People who do well in this work are the people who often have overcome great difficulties in their own life (Interview 5)

While personal commitment to the field, good communication skills and a desire to make a difference were overwhelmingly seen as factors that made a ‘good worker’, one interviewee opposed this view. This interviewee was adamant that although the NGO sector provided opportunities for workers to make a difference, those predisposed to altruism were poorly matched to the sector, as these people more often overlooked their own needs and would ‘burn out’ and leave the sector.

Interviewees with more nuanced perspectives contended that it was only acceptable for people to work without formal training or qualifications in some community service contexts, such as where supervision was strong, where people were not working on their own, and where workers demonstrated the personal qualities of compassion and empathy which are important to the work. In other circumstances, training, preferably formal qualifications, were essential. As one interviewee pointed out:

I like the people who hang on to life experience but are pragmatic enough to know it’s a wonderful supplement but not a substitute for training, support and supervision (Interview 9)

Training requirements were also relaxed for Aboriginal people, with the capacity to deliver and facilitate culturally appropriate services seen as more important than formal qualifications.

Interview participants preferring qualified workers felt those with caseload responsibilities should have degrees in social work, with TAFE qualifications being the absolute minimum for entry. Formal training was perceived to enable workers to perform effectively in community service contexts, giving them the basics of community work, knowledge of boundaries around what they can and can’t do for

clients, and the skills to develop the connections for good referral pathways. As interviewee 3 described:

a good worker fits themselves into the context and the community within which they're working, and seeks to enhance the people within that community and the community itself... it's not a simple matter of being involved one on one, they [good workers] are also people who tend to be involved in social policy and welfare policy and very much kind of a broader developmental approach in the wider community where they will lobby governments and do that kind of thing, all based on an enhancement of society (Interview 3).

Indeed, trained workers were seen as especially important because of the potentially grave consequences of poorly executing interventions:

There is still a residual thought that good work is voluntary work and that that is enough. I think that there is a universal understanding that if you are going to have the power to meddle in people's lives you better have the skills to do it. You better have the competencies to understand what you are doing and why you are doing it. You better have an understanding of the consequences if you do it badly. I don't think that is always understood (Interview 11).

Some interviewees saw formal training and qualifications as especially important at present, as services encountered clients with more complex needs (perhaps in part because of improved knowledge for identifying need), and were increasingly required to work collaboratively with other professionals and organisations. Especially in areas where the population was shrinking, needs were perceived to be increasing and getting more complex, as those left behind in 'dying' communities tended to have higher levels of need, less social capital and less mobility. With casework becoming more complex overall, and funders' and clients' expectations on workers growing, workers were perceived to need a wide range of skills and capacities to assist clients and ensure they could access appropriate support.

What attracts workers to NGOs?

Interviews explored participants' perspectives of the factors that attract workers to non-government community services. One participant was adamant that the NGO sector was not at all attractive, on the basis that it undervalued professional workers. In this view, dedication and commitment to clients were seen to make workers vulnerable to low pay, with non-government agencies perceived to value this commitment over professionalism:

People get devoted. And I think the non-government sector know very well and have practiced for years the ability to tap into devoted people and get them cheap...I don't think they care whether they are employing a professional social worker or a three month trained counsellor most of the time, I don't think they see much difference (Interview 3)

Notwithstanding this critique, other participants pointed to several attractive features of working in the NGO sector, including opportunities to work in mission-driven agencies, opportunities to work closely with service users and make a difference; opportunities to work flexibly and collegially and with fewer bureaucratic constraints

than in the public sector; and opportunities to perform a range of tasks and develop a range of skills.

With community service work generally seen as less stigmatised than in the past, a key strength of the NGO sector was that it offered opportunities to work closely with clients as ‘whole people’ and importantly, to make a difference and see results. Opportunities to observe change in clients were perceived as factors encouraging workers into the NGO sector, and which helped them stay motivated once working within it:

They [workers] love working with people on a day to day basis, they love knowing that they're helping people. Feeling like at the end of the day or week they have assisted someone through providing a service the person needs, or helping them through problems, or building a relationship... (Interview 14)

However, some areas of community services were seen as more attractive than others, with work with the most stigmatised clients (such as in child protection) facing more difficulty in attracting workers than less stigmatised areas like aged care:

The most marginalised groups get the most marginalised workforce because of the resources available to work with that group.... that impacts on people's capacity to stay and engage in that workforce (Interview 11)

Especially in rural and regional areas, workers were perceived as having opportunities to apply and develop a range of skills, without needing to specialise. With flat internal hierarchies, the NGO sector was also seen to offer more opportunities for independent decision making and innovation than in the public sector, with workers better able to act on new ideas (within the remit of their funding agreements) without being constrained by layers of bureaucracy. This contributed to a sense of achievement:

You get a better sense of achievement. You're closer to seeing how your input and efforts deliver outcomes. In a not-for-profit, you are not encumbered by bureaucracy where the system becomes the end rather than a means to an end. Because there is less bureaucracy there is more focus on outcomes. You then get that sense of achievement... (Interview 13)

However, to offer attractive employment opportunities, participants felt overwhelmingly that concerted efforts were necessary to ensure attractive working conditions were available consistently throughout the NGO sector. Particular needs included ensuring stable and adequate funding; the right mix and number of staff; properly resourced managers and boards; engaged external (and sometimes paid) supervision for staff; consistent wages and conditions across the sector; and opportunities for professional development. Indeed, while some workers reportedly found their satisfaction with working with clients over-rode weaknesses of the job, it was perceived as imperative to maintain working conditions to ensure the ongoing strength and sustainability of the NGO sector:

Unless people are willing to campaign for improved wages and conditions they may find after a few years when their circumstances change that they may not be earning enough or it might not provide the kind of work or

flexibility that they want, or it might not provide the career path that they want, and there may be disappointment there. (Interview 14)

6.3 Workforce challenges

Recruitment and retention

Interviewees explored a series of challenges in the NGO community services workforce, with key themes emerging around recruitment, retention and pay; career paths; and training. Overwhelmingly, funding arrangements (explored below) were seen as underpinning factors.

Challenges of recruitment and retention emerged repeatedly in the interviews, and were perceived as problems in all but a few large, prospering metropolitan NGOs. Across the sector, participants perceived particular difficulties recruiting workers in remote and regional areas (especially further west of the Blue Mountains), in recruiting men, and in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal workers (although as the survey findings in Section 4.2 show, Indigenous people are over-represented in the non-government community services workforce. Interviewees identified pay as the single most important reason for these difficulties, especially when it came to recruiting and retaining staff in frontline positions:

The base rate which the workers are getting is only a SACS grade 3 that you could get working in the shops” (Interview 5)

The sector works to the SACS award which is a very low paying award. Of course if you pay low you don't always attract the best kind of people, although I think that is mitigated in the fact that people who work in this sector actually like working in this sector and they enjoy the work and they believe in the work and so they are prepared to accept the lower pay... certainly the SACS award is pretty bad and needs a review (Interview 4)

Recruiting higher quality workers required higher pay, and organisations were reported to be desperately trying to retain workers who were highly sought by other – often partner – organisations:

I couldn't get the kind of policy people that I need doing high level work for the kind of wages you would get on the SACS award... and people are trying to poach them all the time so there is that feeling when you get somebody terrific you would do anything to keep them (Interview 5)

People with appropriate management skills were also perceived to be difficult to recruit, with formal courses tending to lack content related to running organisations. Managers were seen to require complex skill sets consisting of practical experience, enthusiasm and passion and managing people, finances and stakeholder relationships, but the low rates of pay on offer in NGOs, especially small NGOs, were seen to contribute to the underdevelopment of management expertise in the sector.

However, while policy, management, administrative and specialist workers could be difficult to recruit and retain, turnover of frontline staff provided the most significant challenge, with unfilled vacancies perceived to strain organisations and other colleagues, and to compromise service quality overall:

You can run short if you need to with admin people and you can carry vacancies until you advertise. You can tolerate a high turnover there. With your direct staff, they are the difference between quality service or not. They are crucial (Interview 13).

As NGO workers themselves, some interviewees commented on their own circumstances, reporting taking substantial drops in pay to work in their current positions. As such, they saw parallels with trends observed among more junior workers (especially those in direct care roles). Speaking about the sector generally, interviewees were concerned that low pay would preclude even those preferring to work in the NGO sector from doing so, as they would be unable to meet mortgage and other commitments. Overall, this narrowed who was entering the workforce, meaning that quality candidates could not consider NGO community services, and that those who did work in the sector may not be those who necessarily had the best skills for the job.

Indeed, some interviewees explored how new entrants were not always appropriate. Indeed, NGOs were criticised for persistent traditions of recruiting informally rather than from a pool of people with proven capability, a trend seen to raise problems for service quality. One interviewee described how workers could enter the field unintentionally, explaining the typical case of someone who:

got a job in a refuge because their mate was working in a refuge and they did an overnight shift. It's like they became accidental youth workers (Interview 7)

While the interviewee observed this less in recent years, they still felt that:

...some of the relief workers you get are just friends of friends...I don't like it. Personally I think when advocating on behalf of young people, you want to have the best possible workers with the right skill set. (Interview 7)

For organisations in some areas, low pay meant recruitment was only realistic from the immediate area, compromising capacity to draw quality staff from further afield:

You've got to live locally for jobs paying that way to make sense. You won't be travelling from the other side of town for a Level 3 SACS award (Interview 6)

Low pay was also interpreted within the field as a sign of disrespect, both compared with professionals in other NGOs, and with workers in the government sector or in public health:

People look down on this sector. People think that a youth worker is like a pretend social worker. If you are working with the homeless is not nearly as recognized or important as working in a government department or working in medicine. The value of the work is not recognized. (Interview 7)

As well as limiting sources of new workers and suggesting the work was low status, low pay meant that even when similar work was being done by NGOs and

government workers, NGO workers were seen as less professional, and NGO workers reportedly became used to working in environments where their achievements were not properly valued. More profoundly, low pay meant high rates of exit from the sector, with workers lost to either larger charities offering salary sacrificing, or to the government sector.

We constantly have this situation where we grow good workers, but the good workers are skimmed off the top and moved to other industries like DoCS and departmental positions (Interview 7)

While one interviewee from a large, established NGO found people came into the organisation from government, most observed the contrary dynamic, portraying the NGO sector as the training ground for government workers:

the NGO sector tends to be a training ground for the government sector, so people tend to work in NGOs then go to better paid jobs, so that is really disheartening for people who stay, and for managers (Interview 2)

Interviewees described workers moving to jobs paying \$15000 or more in the government sector and with more reasonable hours, workloads, conditions and career paths than in NGOs. The problem of retaining workers also appeared to be most acute in country NSW:

I talk to country services and they routinely will take on new graduates, work really hard with them because they do bring a good skill set, really get them trained, and then the local prisons come along and hijack them on probation, parole or mental health or whatever. (Interview 1)

DoCS out-guns us every time on about a 25 to 30 percent increase, and sometimes even greater (Interview 9)

Predictably, the best workers were considered the most likely to leave:

when you've got a sector that is undervalued then it is the good people that go (Interview 8)

This made it difficult to hold workers in leadership positions in the NGO sector:

Particularly within our leadership positions we are finding that we can't get them through. We might get them in the sector initially but once they have enough skills and ability they go into a better paid government position which means we are not getting the skills through into leadership positions (Interview 15).

Career paths and working conditions

Pay was not the only factor observed to contribute to difficulties recruiting staff, and an exodus of workers from NGO community services, often into the government sector. The way career paths are structured in NGOs was also perceived as critical workforce issues:

People get stuck because of lack of career paths and need to go into the government sector for security and pay. If this continues, the government will have no one to outsource services to, because it's so difficult to recruit and retain NGO staff (Interview 12)

Interviewees explained how career pathways in small organisations were especially limited. Advancement prospects were restricted where management structures were flat, and where there was perhaps only one manager, and no specialist or advanced practitioner roles.

You look at the smaller stand alone services, there are the case workers, maybe a team leader and then a director or manager. At least in a bigger organisation there are career pathways (Interview 1)

There aren't a lot of career paths. You can be a worker in the organisation and then if the coordinator moves on you may become the coordinator but that's maybe it... the price you pay [for having sector comprised of small organisations] is that very good people may have to move on in order to gain new skills, take on more responsibility or earn more money (Interview 5)

Compounding the problem was that few higher level career opportunities were likely to be vacant. Positions were perceived to have been 'clogged up' by baby boomers for several years, with positions only opening as they reached retirement age:

There are careers to be had in this sector and we need to cultivate that for the next generation of leaders. The problem is that we have had the baby boomers come through who have stayed here for 30 years and have blocked the promotional positions. (Interview 11)

Interviewees were critical of the lack of opportunities for practitioners to progress by developing their expertise or specialising. Rather, practitioners needed to enter management positions to earn more money or advance their careers, even though they might not necessarily prefer to manage services, or have the appropriate skills and training to do so.

You have to almost leave the practitioner side of things in order to advance... if you want to be a practitioner you are going to be sitting at a certain level and its going to be difficult to maintain your practitioner role as you move up into administration.... there is a limit to how far you can go as a practitioner in the non-government sector (Interview 3)

Because there is no career path in this sector, the way people can earn more money is to become a manager. So you have these people that may have had a desire to help people, now having to become managers to earn more money and who are not really trained to do that... a lot of people do that and end up feeling bitter. (Interview 7)

Career paths in government services were considered more attractive, because of the availability of mid-level management positions (which few NGOs could afford).

It should also be noted that the career progression for community workers in NSW NGOs was particularly limited in comparison to other states such as QLD which has a SACS award incorporating progression far beyond the NSW SACS Grade 6 Step 5.

Other working conditions perceived by stakeholders to make recruitment and retention difficult for NGOs included workload and associated stress; difficulty balancing aspects of job roles (eg requirements to both support and report clients in the child welfare field); a lack of work family balance; a lack of study opportunities; inconsistent opportunities for salary packaging; and limited professional development opportunities; particularly in small organisations without the capacity to run their own training. Workers were perceived to routinely perform above what is stipulated in funding agreements, and managers were perceived to work extra unpaid hours writing funding submissions:

Demand is so high we do far beyond what we are paid to do for different bodies (Interview 15)

A lot of the non direct service delivery stuff gets done in your own time, like writing a funding submission or seven (Interview 5)

Further, being required to perform against numerical sets of outputs rather than quality criteria, workers could also feel disheartened:

People can get really jaded, really disenchanted, really burnt out and really cynical really quickly. It also means that people form the wrong impression in their early human service work career that integrity is a negotiable (Interview 9)

Job insecurity, linked to funding arrangements, was also considered less than ideal.

Funding arrangements

Government funding arrangements were perceived to raise major challenges for the NGO workforce. Two issues were seen to impede the NGO sector's capacity to retain good staff: inadequate funding levels, and the short term nature of funding agreements. By funding services inadequately and on a short term basis, governments were perceived to undermine their own needs and capacity, inadequately resourcing the sector on which they increasingly depend.

Funding arrangements were seen as largely inadequate to provide for appropriate levels of pay, although larger charities with additional flows of funds reportedly had more scope to pay than smaller, government dependent NGOs. Competition for funding was perceived to cause organisations to promise too much in order to win contracts, to sacrifice service quality for quantity of output, and to encourage workers to donate unpaid time rather than refuse services, contributing to burnout:

It has been difficult to set up work that has organisational boundaries that say if we only got this amount of resources we can only do this much (Interview 8).

The government sector has seen the non-government sector as cheaper and to deliver more effectively than the government, and it probably is. But that

shouldn't be at the cost of career pathways and attracting the right staff (Interview 1)

Others felt that program funding was acceptable, but identified a lack of funding available for infrastructure, including workforce planning:

You can't keep a sector developing and growing if you can't get the dollars for quality workforce and that sort of infrastructure (Interview 4)

As well as inadequate funding, competitive tendering was seen as a major issue. Staff tenure and job security were seen as overlooked in tendering processes, creating uncertainty around funding which translated into anxiety about organisational sustainability and job continuity:

Far too much work in the industry is funded on a temporary basis. It means that jobs are insecure (Interview 14)

Current arrangements typically involving funding agreements of three years or less were seen to disrupt processes of community building throughout the NGO sector, undermining the contribution of workers and organisations.

The government is really scared of recurring funding. So they will fund things for 2-3 years and that's very stressful for not only people who are developing and rolling out the programs but also for the people working in those programs who sometimes, up to a month before the program is to be renewed, don't know whether or not they are going to have a job. That's just poor management. It should never get to that stage but there's a kind of a disrespect for people (Interview 4)

Further, receipt of funding from several sources was reported to shift managers' gaze inward, to focus on organisational sustainability rather than the needs of clients or workers, and the need to sustain funding distracted staff from service delivery, reportedly fuelling movement or churning.

Funding periods were seen as largely inadequate to develop relationships, to set up services, and build up networks and contacts, and interviewees consistently reported that in order to ensure continuity, staff needed to source new jobs before completing short term funding contracts, leaving projects unfinished. The short term nature of jobs also deterred some from building qualifications and careers in the sector. One interviewee summed this up:

The very short term nature of funding in this industry works against the establishment of good solid jobs, where people feel like 'well, I'm in this sector for the long term and I want to build qualifications and develop a career path'. It does work against people's long term commitment to the industry. That means losing skills over time. (Interview 14)

An issue arising from several of the interviews was the need for entitlements to be portable throughout the sector, in a scheme underwritten by government. This would at least provide some continuity of service and access to entitlements for workers cobbling together careers from a string of positions in different agencies.

6.4 Perspectives on workforce strategies

Because of the complex and sensitive nature of the challenges explored above, interviewees called for long term, government led initiatives. Short term solutions to problems of turnover, for example increasing reliance on temporary staff, were seen to exacerbate instability, disrupting relationship building. Relationships with clients were seen to be too complex and sensitive to be ‘picked up overnight’ by new workers even if workers were experienced. To ensure quality and sustainability for clients, staff retention and job continuity thus emerged as key priorities:

In order to achieve maximum results there really has to be some relationship between the worker and the client that endures, and when clients see a different person every time they go into the office or they have different people caring for them differently, it is very difficult to get that kind of psycho or social stability (Interview 6)

Improved pay, primarily an improved pay and career structure in the SACS award (which would need to then be honoured by all government funders), was seen as critical to attracting and retaining higher quality workers. Organisations were creative in the way they recruited positions, for example building relationships with Aboriginal communities to develop potential sources of labour. They were also creative in how they packaged positions, offering flexibility and other attractive working conditions, including, where possible, incentives to work in regional areas. However, capacity to do so was uneven across the sector, and financial support was considered necessary.

Most of these services are running on such a thin line between being financial and not, they don't have a lot of money to plough into schemes to support and encourage people to work there" (Interview 1)

Pay parity with governments was held up as the ideal, as equity across the sector would enable good workers to remain in NGOs. Improved pay was also important as a way to demonstrate respect, and to raise expectations of the workforce, and to raise performance.

If they did have an award that paid more and were better acknowledged then the quality of our workforce would improve and result in better service for our clients (Interview 10)

Indeed, important symbolism was attached to pay. Higher funding, and longer term funding were seen as ways to show respect for caring work, symbolising the value of NGO community services work to government and the general public, thereby validating partnerships between governments and the NGO sector:

It's hard sometimes to take pride in your work when the government provides only short term funding or cuts funding. The government has a role in improving the public's perception of this work (Interview 10)

We need a proper relationship with government that sees us equal to them (Interview 15)

Training emerged as a critical strategy for retaining staff and ensuring standards of quality, with interviewees recognising the need to overturn historical assumptions that community services is a 'soft' area, appropriate for untrained people. Interviewees called for financial support for training (including acquisition of tertiary qualifications, not just short courses); access to training for regional workers; improved training capacity at TAFE in some regional areas; more synergy between industry and the training curriculum; minimum qualifications (but with scope to recognise prior learning); government funded traineeships and scholarships; and more extensive training for managers, leaders and Boards.

Improved job design and career structures were also perceived as necessary in order to improve workforce capacity and sustainability. Ideas included rotating workers away from the client interface as a way to prevent burnout, ensuring worker autonomy, introducing a government funded system allowing leave to be portable and transferable between organisations, and extending supports through supervision. Supervision, however, was seen as needing to be based on a professional development rather than line management model, to ensure workers had opportunity to reflect and understand their work in the broadest sense, that is, to give:

opportunities to look beyond their day to day work and find context in what they do. It's about providing people with a way to understand the work that they do in a broader context. (Interview 4)

Building career pathways into the SACS Award was of paramount importance. Pathways for workers wishing to remain in direct practice would help retain quality frontline practitioners. Some interviewees discussed the need for advanced practitioner status, accompanied by a differentiated wage structure, to be built into the Award, to help retain quality workers at the frontline, or as one interviewee explained, to:

keep a high level of experience and expertise without forcing people to become managers, because we know that not everyone wants to become a manager and there are only so many managers you can have (Interview 14)

Overall, interviewees described how employers, managers, workers and other stakeholders agreed the time is ripe for governments to lead initiatives to improve workforce quality and sustainability, and that any initiative will be more successful if based on sector-wide cooperation. For governments, responding to the broad coalition of support for improving pay, funding, and career structures, and co-ordinating existing workforce initiatives to do so, appear appropriate ways forward.

7 Towards strategies that promote capacity and sustainability

The data presented in this report provides a clear indication of the need for reform within the community services sector, to ensure the workforce has the capacity to meet service demand and achieve social policy goals. This section examines a number of possible strategies that arise from the research. The reforms suggested aim to promote capacity and sustainability within the sector, and are underpinned by recognition that many of the workforce challenges discussed above, may threaten the delivery of high quality services.

A commitment to best practice was often evident as workers, managers, advocates and other stakeholders spoke during focus groups and interviews. However, successful sectoral reform also requires the commitment and leadership of employers, policy-makers and funders. As the NGO sector takes on more responsibility for service delivery, effective action to promote workforce capacity and sustainability are especially important. The strategies discussed below are multiple and diverse – ranging from those which broadly focus on reforming policy to more modest initiatives.

Co-operation, co-ordination and leadership

As outlined in Sections 1.3 and 2.3, several workforce initiatives are currently in place. Yet the effectiveness of these initiatives rests on ongoing co-operation, leadership and co-ordination. As the literature suggests, strategies that aim to change the behaviour of individual workers or encourage employers to develop single initiatives are likely to have limited effect, with more fundamental reforms required to address the wider policy structures and funding arrangements that shape workforce characteristics and dynamics (Pierce and Long, 2002; Roche, 2002; Deakin and Gethin, 2007). Indeed, stakeholder interviewees pointed out that although organisations could be creative in the conditions they offered, co-ordinated strategies were required, and interviewees agreed the time is ripe for governments to lead co-operative sector-wide initiatives to improve workforce quality and sustainability.

Nationally, workforce planning has had Ministerial leadership, being an agreed priority at the 2008 and 2009 meetings of the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council (CDSMC). CDSMC strategies include developing a profile of the community services workforce; and resolving issues around training, qualifications, career pathways and retention in both government and non government (CDSMC 2008, 2009). The next stage should be to build progressively on these initiatives with co-ordinated strategies for addressing workforce issues in other community service areas, including child and family services; and housing and homelessness.

As outlined in section 2.3, co-ordinated planning initiatives are underway in a number of community service systems, including in the United Kingdom and in Australian children's services, through COAG. States are also undertaking workforce planning, although these strategies tend to be in particular sub-industries, such as Tasmanian disability services and Queensland child protection. However, in contrast to other states, and recognising that workers move across community service sub-industries, the NSW government may wish to consider more comprehensive strategies that address challenges common across the non-government sector, as well as those in specific fields.

Improving recruitment, retention, recognition and reward

The research suggests a need to work cooperatively with peak agencies, unions and employers to consider comprehensive strategies for state-wide workforce planning and development, in particular, to address issues of pay and job security, as these emerged as issues in all the strands of the research: the literature review, survey, focus groups and stakeholder interviews. Whilst employers may offer their own incentives to recruit and retain staff, such as above average remuneration, initiatives at the organisational level are likely to be introduced unevenly, giving single organisations an edge in recruiting and retaining staff, and exacerbating competition between organisations for staff. As such, sector-wide incentives which improve the status of non-government community services work in the context of the wider workforce, should be considered, such as reforming the SACS award. With workers overwhelmingly female and older than the wider workforce, competitive wages and conditions may prove particularly important to attracting and retaining younger workers and men.

This research has shown that in NSW, pay, career paths and job security are foremost issues for workers and stakeholders. A strategy to consider is the ASU's (2009) comprehensive plan to improve working conditions in the sector. In particular, the 'advanced practitioner' classification in the plan offers a way to improve remuneration and career paths, retain frontline skills, and develop the professional profile of community services work. Indeed, several stakeholder interviewees identified the need for this structure to help retain quality workers and the frontline, a point supported in the literature (Healy et al, 2009).

In terms of working conditions, focus group participants pointed to the need for a single occupational classification structure across community services, and focus group and stakeholder interviewees supported developing a scheme underwritten by government to make long service leave portable across the sector, a point which has also emerged in the literature (MacDermott, 2006; ASU, 2009). The survey suggested that while salary packaging does assist in bolstering remuneration benefits, it is not consistently available, and is not used by all who have access to it, suggesting room to support organisations to provide these opportunities. The survey also underlined the need for paid maternity leave, with the proportion of NGO workers reporting their employers offered it being much lower than that in the wider NSW workforce.

Further, although industrial tribunals have not historically recognised the skills involved in community services work, developments in Queensland also suggest pay equity principles, and claims for award restructuring, may provide a strategy for improving wages and conditions. The role of the NSW Industrial Commission in awarding pay increases to SACS workers should be reconsidered in light of Queensland developments, along with strategies for ensuring budgetary commitment to both honouring any increase in the SACS award and ensuring opportunities for career progression.

Professionalisation, qualifications and training

Comprehensive workforce strategies also need to consider professionalization of the sector, which may include establishing minimum qualification and staffing standards, staff development and training, accreditation or codes of practice (AASW, 2009;

Higham, 2001). Although the survey indicated that a high proportion of NGO community service workers have post-school qualifications, qualification levels remain contentious in the sector, especially among stakeholder interviewees. Recognising that qualification levels currently vary greatly, stakeholder interviewees generally supported Certificate IV level qualifications as an appropriate minimum overall, although qualifications in social work were considered the key professional qualification for the sector. Strategies to introduce a minimum level of qualification should be considered, with a focus on ensuring the retention of experienced unqualified workers.

In addition, although the survey showed higher levels of access to employer-funded training than in the workforce generally, training and skill development emerged as key points of debate in the qualitative work. Stakeholder interviewees considered training important not only for retaining staff and ensuring standards of quality, but also for overturning historical assumptions that community services are a 'soft' area appropriate for an untrained workforce. Both the literature review and stakeholder interviewees highlighted the importance of training strategies, especially for workers in funded agencies in rural and regional areas. Focus group participants also identified a need for access to government funded training (especially as gaining qualifications incurred high personal costs), but saw availability of opportunities to be currently uneven across the sector.

However, while formal qualifications and structured training emerge as important from the study, these should not be considered the only strategy for improving skill levels. Even qualified workers require supports such as supervision and mentoring, and job redesign, including rotating workers away from the client interface to prevent burnout, and ensuring worker autonomy. Indeed, stakeholder interviewees identified supervision as necessary for attuning communication skills to the context of working with disadvantaged people, and for helping workers reflect on and understand their work in context. However, interviewees saw supervision as needing to be based on a professional development rather than line management model – the model which has been linked to job satisfaction and retention (Argyle Research, 2008; Barth et al, 2008.) The survey findings indicate room for improvement in supervision practices in the NGO community services workforce, with high proportions reporting a lack of access to formal supervision.

The importance of funding

As the stakeholder interviews and focus group findings suggest, funding arrangements are integral to workforce management and development. Stakeholder interviewees saw higher levels of funding, and longer term funding, as ways to show respect for community services work, to validate partnerships between governments and the NGO sector, and to improve the quality and sustainability of service delivery. Similarly in the focus groups, participants repeatedly highlighted the need for more sustainable funding levels if the sector is to meet demand. Participants suggest that improving funding levels would help improve not only working conditions, but also the capacity for workers to genuinely respond to the needs of clients, and therefore their job satisfaction and willingness to remain in the sector. Further, the research highlights the need to ensure funded services can also support staff training, career progression and job security to reflect a commitment to the non-government sector as long term partners.

Missing from focus groups and interview data was a discussion of finding alternative revenue sources for the sector. Many workers in the study worked in organisations that relied solely on government funding – an insecure position during times of fiscal constraint - and concentrated their efforts on responding to government tenders and expressions of interest. There was almost no discussion in focus groups or stakeholder interviews of alternative sources of income such as fund raising, corporate sponsorship, or any entrepreneurial expansion of organisations, or the implications of such strategies for workforce management and development. Focus group data suggests uneasiness amongst some workers over what they believed was an increasing marketisation of community services. Yet whilst the nature of community services work precludes much revenue raising, a long term strategy for the sector may be to reduce reliance on government funding, insofar as funding practices are perceived to undermine workforce capacity and sustainability.

Researching the NGO community services workforce

A further strategy relates to research and the availability of data to support evidence-based planning of the community services sector. Through the conduct of this research it became clear that limitations in national data collections restrict the ability of researchers to provide a definitive account of community service workers' characteristics, needs and patterns of movement in and out of the NGO sector. In order to take community services workforce research forward, it is proposed that national statistical data collections including the Australian Census be collected in ways that disaggregate employment in non-profit and commercial organisations, and, where possible, between community services occupations and industries using the new ANZSCO and ANZSIC classifications at the highest level of detail available.

In addition, a strategy that would provide a more accurate record of the size of the sector would be to establish a register of not-for-profit organisations. As well as providing a more accurate record of sectoral size, such a register would also be a useful sampling frame for further workforce research. This register could also be used as a source of information about unpaid or volunteer workers and carers within the sector and thus would provide a more complete picture of the workforce.

There is also a need for further research to explore the finer details of salary packaging arrangements in the NGO sector, in particular, organisational practices and decision making about what is offered, the value of these arrangements to workers, and workers' reasons for non-take up. NGO workers' perspectives also need to be interpreted in comparison with public sector workers' experiences, and longitudinal research could be used to track workers' experiences and perceptions over time.

8 Conclusions

This report has presented evidence specific to NSW about labour dynamics in the non-government community services sector, to inform strategies for building workforce capacity and sustainability. Together, the four research strands (literature review, survey, focus groups and stakeholder interviews) provide vital information about the state of the non-government sector workforce, highlighting both a series of strengths and challenges, and strategies for improving capacity and sustainability.

Each strand of the research confirms the strength of the non-government sector workforce. As found in previous studies, the community service workers in this study reported high levels of commitment to their jobs, and to providing quality services for vulnerable clients. They also perceived the NGO sector to offer better opportunities to make a difference in the community, and to build relationships and achieve outcomes for clients, than in the government or for-profit sectors.

While survey data showed respondents were less satisfied with their pay and job security than other workers in NSW, they also felt their jobs were more interesting, and that they were supported in professional development, with higher levels of attendance at conferences and seminars and employer funded training than other workers in NSW. Community service workers also appeared to value some of the organisational initiatives introduced to reward and retain staff such as salary packaging (although it is not universally offered) and flexible work (although part time work is not universally preferred). Notwithstanding, higher proportions of NGO workers than others were actively looking for another job.

Indeed, the research highlights a number of challenges in recruiting, retaining and developing skilled practitioners. Qualitative work indicated that heavy workloads, low-levels of pay, limited opportunities for career advancement (especially in smaller NGOs), job insecurity, and under-employment are all likely contributors to high turnover of staff. In addition, the fragmented nature of the sector with multiple pathways into jobs, and a large range of qualification levels make professionalization efforts problematic.

These challenges, which appear common across these areas of community services, underpin the need for comprehensive reforms, which treat workforce management as key to the development of quality community service delivery. Rather than relying on individual or employer choices to change behaviour, strategies need to address the structures and systems that shape the workforce. Initiatives need to be integrated to involve policy, resourcing, planning, professional and industrial regulation, training and skill development, and the redesign of jobs. Implementing these reforms will require commitment from all levels of government, peak bodies and professional associations, key stakeholders, sectoral leaders and workers.

Overall, the study's key findings are:

Workforce characteristics

- NGO workers comprise around 60.1 percent of the community services workforce in NSW (not including childcare or residential aged care).

- NGO survey respondents were overwhelmingly female, and older than the wider workforce in NSW.
- There were higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, and lower proportions of overseas-born workers in the NGO sample than in the broader population and workforce.

Attitudes to work and job satisfaction

- NGO workers' are highly committed to helping their clients and to their job. Jobs where workers could effectively respond to the needs of clients, and which were relatively free from bureaucratic constraints were most valued. The service ethic which motivates workers also leaves them vulnerable to burnout and to accepting poor working conditions and undervaluation, and thus threatens workforce sustainability.
- NGO community service workers' satisfaction with key dimensions of their jobs differs from the wider workforce in some important respects. Higher proportions of NGO workers were dissatisfied with their pay and job security.
- Higher proportions of NGO workers indicated that their work was stressful, complex, and time pressured. Perhaps as a reflection of these indicators, NSW community service workers have taken more annual leave and sick leave than other workers in the last 12 months, and have spent more time on workers' compensation.
- There is a wide difference between NGO community service workers' access to maternity leave (26.2 percent) and that of other workers in NSW (51.9 percent), indicating a clear need for reform.

Working conditions

- NGO workers are more likely to work part time than other workers in NSW. Whilst some of these workers enjoy the flexibility that a part time appointment offers, almost one third of part time workers were doing so because that was all that was offered to them.
- Salary packaging was valued by workers however it was not universally offered or accessed. Expanding access to salary sacrificing options would ensure consistency across the sector.
- Changes to the SACS award that improve remuneration and career structure for workers are required to help attract and retain skilled practitioners. An ideal model would provide pay parity with government employees.

Education, training and professional development

- High levels of workers within the sector have post school qualifications, with 61.1 percent of respondents having a university degree or higher, and just under one in ten workers having no formal qualifications. This may indicate a sectoral movement towards professionalization, and suggests that the

introduction of minimum qualification levels would not disadvantage the great majority of workers.

- Workers within the sector engage in professional development opportunities such as conference attendance and employer funded training more frequently than other workers in NSW.
- Closer collaboration with the educational and training sector is required for course content to align with projected needs and workforce planning.
- Given the movement of workers between government and non-government agencies, the training and further education of workers should be considered a shared responsibility.

Labour dynamics

- Higher proportions of NGO workers than other NSW workers reported intending to change jobs, with around a third of survey respondents having looked for another job in the 4 weeks prior to being surveyed.
- The most notable labour dynamic is the movement of workers within the NGO sector itself, with more than half of the survey respondents indicating that they have moved into their current job from a different NGO employer, and high proportions having moved jobs within the same NGO.
- There is also much movement of workers between the government and non-government sector, although this is less frequent. A common pathway is for workers to gain initial experience and some training in the NGO sector before moving across to the government sector. Many of these workers will return to the NGO sector later in their careers.
- The most common reasons for workers leaving their jobs were retirement, indicating the ageing of this workforce, followed by dissatisfaction with pay, concerns about the nature of the work, and opportunities for career advancement.

Strategies for reform

- Strategies for reform require collective and coordinated action by all stakeholders and should involve changes to policy structures and arrangements, resourcing and workforce planning, professional and industrial regulation, training and skill development, and the redesign of jobs.
- There is much motivation amongst sectoral leaders and community service workers for comprehensive reform, however, government led initiatives are required.
- The sector's heavy reliance on government funding compounds the need for funding policy reform and suggests that workforce planning and development examine changes to funding arrangements that support improved working conditions.

- Greater investment in workforce planning and development should be considered a priority and factored into funding contracts.
- Workforce planning and development is constrained by inadequacies and gaps in national and state-wide data collection strategies and sources.

Data collection

- There is a critical gap in community service workforce data, and this limits workforce planning, development and research. Changes and additions to the collection of national and state-wide data are recommended. This includes disaggregating employment in non-profit and commercial organisations, and between community service subsectors within the Australian Census; and establishing a register of not-for-profit organisations.

The key findings of this study are consistent with much of the literature and thus indicate that many of the sectoral challenges are long-standing and chronic. The NGO community services sector is likely to expand as governments continue to engage them in partnerships to deliver services, and in the context of increasing need caused by population ageing and the economic downturn. Workforce reform and development is critical for workers to meet a growing demand and increasing complexity of need. The research presented in this report provides empirical evidence to inform workforce planning and development. The strategies proposed in this report are made to inform an agenda for action. Workforce reform requires the government to undertake a leadership or champion role in implementing them. It also requires sectoral representatives taking a stronger lead in advocating the role of the sector and the needs of its workers.

Appendix A

Questioning schedule for focus group

1. What type of work do you do?
2. What kinds of things attract you to the *type of work* that you do?
3. What kinds of things attract you to the *organisation* you work for?
4. What do you think are the main differences between working for a non-government, government or private sector organisation, if any?
5. What are the advantages of working in the non-government sector?
6. What are the downsides to working in the non-government sector?
7. When you think about whether to stay in your job or look for another, what kinds of things do you consider?
8. If you were looking for a new job, would you look in the non-government, government or private sector? Why? Which sector would you prefer *not* to work for and why?
9. What do you think would make careers in the NGO sector more attractive?
10. Overall, what do you think needs to be done to develop and sustain a quality workforce in the non-government community service sector?
11. What advice would you give to people considering careers in community services?
12. What advice would you give to service managers about supporting the workforce?
13. What would you like to tell policy makers about the community services workforce?

Appendix B

Questions for stakeholder interviews

1. Can you tell me about your agency and your role?
2. What kinds of staff work in your agency/member agencies? (*Occupations, levels of training and experience, disciplinary backgrounds etc*)
3. What do you think are the characteristics and capabilities of good workers in this field?
4. What do you think are the characteristics of good jobs in this field?
5. What do you think makes working in the non-government sector attractive?
6. From your perspective, what are the main workforce issues and challenges affecting non-government agencies?
7. What do these mean for your agency/agencies/sector?
8. In what ways are these workforce challenges affecting service delivery and outcomes for clients?
9. What kinds of things are being done (in your organisation or across the sector) to address these challenges?
10. What else do you think would help improve workforce quality, capacity and sustainability?
11. What do you think would make careers in the non-government sector more attractive?
12. What advice would/do you give to people considering careers in community services? Are there any ways they could better prepare?
13. What advice would/do you give to service managers about supporting the workforce?
14. What advice would/do you give to policy makers about supporting the community services workforce?

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