

SEMINAR F – FUNDING & FINANCE

“Slow Boiling Frogs” – Wages, Conditions & Viability Issues for the Non-Government Human Services Sector

Key themes / issues / questions arising from discussion:

Ruth Marshall

Workchoices Legislation: unsure what will happen.
What is the ASU and who do they cover?
Diverse organisations. Employ people into a broad range of positions.
Social and Community Services Award
Crisis Assistance
Indigenous
Community Employment and Training Services Award
Non-Award coverage as well
Conditions in awards reflect the type of work that they do. Sometime conditions are provided above the award to attract and retain staff.

Summary of workchoices.

“No disadvantage test”. Agreements had to be above or equal to awards.
This provision no longer exists and only 5 conditions will be in awards;

Annual Leave

Personal Leave

Parental Leave: 52 weeks unpaid

Maximum number of ordinary hours, averaged out over a year.

Conditions to go, and important to our sector:

Penalty rates and location allowances.

Incremental progression

Jury duty

Notice of termination

Superannuation (but protected by legislation)

Administrative taskforce will review the awards and amend them.

May not happen overnight, but the process may finish by the end of the year.

Streamline of all awards. One award per industry.

The FairPay commission has been established: similar to the US and UK system.

In the US, they have a large number of working poor.

It used to be set by the Industrial Relations Commission; government, employers and unions would put their position to the commission, who would make a determination based on all of the information.

The FairPay Commission will now make this decision. Fear is that real wages will reduce.

Some organisations have Enterprise Bargaining Agreements: some have good conditions.

Unfair dismissal; less than 100 employees then the laws no longer exist.

More than 100 employees; not immune. Organisation can make “genuine operational decisions”.

Removing the umpire; Industrial Relations Commission. Had the power to prevent or settle dispute. Their power has been watered down. Can no longer hear test cases.

There is no easy answer to many of the questions; some things are still unclear.
Need to ensure all workers are treated in a fair and equitable way.
All current contracts stand until they expire.
Federal Government; trying funding to employment conditions eg- Tafe and Universities. Competitive tendering; race to the bottom.
We need to improve the conditions in this sector, in order to recruit and retain staff, and not only rely on the good will of the people working in the sector.
Union; looking at setting Industry Standards. Standard agreements rather than Awards; utilise pro-forma. Multi-Agency agreements.
The sector is all about Social Justice; act now to ensure that the next generation does not inherit worse conditions.

Ara Cresswell

Contribution of the community sector and what we need to do.
Are we viable and what does that mean?
MLK: As long as there is poverty, I can never be totally rich.... Can never be totally what I can be, until you can be what you need to be.
Strength of the sector: fights inequality and equity for all people. We are groaning under the weight of need.
How do we retain passion, soul?
ACTCOSS- concerned about the ongoing viability of the sector, in particular about the conditions and wages.
Working with unions and other groups regarding the difference between the public sector and the community sector.
Comparison of wages; extreme discrepancies.
Pay peanuts; get monkeys?
Particular concern; ageing. We need to address the needs of our sector.
Funding services and supports for disadvantaged; welfare dependency and the community services sector is leaching the resources of governments.
We struggle for legitimacy. These views are incorrect and unsustainable.
As a social sustainable project; can it change the way the resources are allocated. To have teeth, we need to be able to demonstrate that on a fundamental level, it's worth putting resources, attention and energy into building the community.
Engage with other peoples frames of reference. If it doesn't work for the most alienated, then why do it.
Drain on economy and productive lives of others.
Increase social engagement; promotes economic growth.
Philosophical challenges and tensions; community services in the frame of economic value- strengthen orthodox view. Must make whatever arguments are necessary to attain resources to meet our end goals. Demonstrate the economic value of service; break down false dichotomy between social versus economic.

In 2003, the ACT altered the way in which it contracts with the community service sector. Not progressed as far as necessary.

2004; ACT government made a lot of promises and established a taskforce to look at these issues. Commitments have come to nothing. Made a commitment regarding indexation; got into the 2005 budget without money attached. Promised to be in 2006 budget.

Community Sector taskforce was borne. ASU and ACTCOSS got together to develop the campaign; the heart of the community.
Postcard; 2000 signed and sent in to ACTCOSS. To say; the community cares.
Finalisation of the taskforce; no progression of the community sector agenda.
ACTCOSS has not signed up to the recommendations; not as strong as they would like.

The recommendation address;
Workforce development
Industrial Relations advice to employers; aside from the CCI
Occupational Health and Safety and accessible
Mandatory and portable long service leave scheme

Sustainability

Not a marginal area of activity that does not require the organisational support.
Reshaping of Australia's economic structure; the community services sector is part of that.
Fundamentally shift structural inequity.
We need to mount campaigns and work together to improve the conditions in our sector. Sector is in serious trouble; we need to turn this around.

Mat Rowell

Share experiences across different states.

Tasmania sector viability

- How we changed the award
- How we got government to fund the award
- The indexation formula

Early 2002, lodged a claim regarding pay equity principles. Industrial Commission was not concerned about equity/parity with government/similar roles in private sector.

TASCOSS actively engaged with the unions and employees, but also with the employer representative- CCI.

Employers; not opposed to wage increases, rather the impact on their own budgets.

High staff turnover, staff recruitment and halting poaching.

Government were not going to make a commitment that they would across the board fund the increases requested in the award.

IR hearing.

2004: Significant addition to the work value classifications under review.

12% salary increase over 3 years, plus introduction of higher level-8.

Assisting Government to understand the role of the Community Services Sector.

Collaborative work was shut down during the election campaign. Fortunate that the Minister changed and had a different perspective on the issue of indexation.

Formula developed, variable over the last 3 years, but is 4% this year.

Government learnt; there was a political imperative to fund community service organisations.

Workforce development; across government issue.

From the inside of the campaign; it was long and arduous. Involved a lot of risk taking.

The work and risks were necessary. More resourced and sustainable the sector is; the better the service the clients will receive.

Workchoices; the award may not be the platform to achieve that change into the future.

Questions

Underfunding; where does it stop, how do we stop it.

Government relationships

Real Issues for Commonwealth funded agencies. Tensions; if you don't do it, someone else will, or clients miss out.

ACT: tenders for services; no tenders offered as the funding was not adequate. Try to work together; agree to not sell each other short.

Lowest common denominator. Encourage government not to underfund services.

Skills shortage

Diverse sector; size of the state.

Shortage can work in our favour; individual agencies are improving their own conditions.

Workchoices; resulting in increased union membership?

Not @ the ASU in WA. The Legislation undermines the role of unions. Maybe in other states.