



**Queensland Working
Women's Service Inc
Annual Report
2007/2008**

Contents

Topic	Page Number
Contents	2
QWWS Objectives	2
President/Chairperson's Message	3
Management Committee	4
Directors Report	5
Staff	7
Special Projects	8
YWAS Co-coordinators Report	11
QWWS Senior Industrial Officers Report	16
Hot topics	21
Auditors Report	Attachment

QWWS Objectives

- Provide accessible services that support women from diverse backgrounds throughout Queensland to make informed choices about issues that affect them in the workplace.
- Take appropriate action to assist women to achieve workplace justice.
- Increase both women's knowledge and confidence in the workplace and community understanding of workplace issues.
- Foster complementary relationships with women's sector organisations and other work-related services provided by unions, government and other agencies to enhance the status of women.
- To provide relevant relief from verbal, emotional and financial abuse at work; the loss of work; discrimination at work; and the associated conditions of distress, suffering, misfortune and helplessness and potential homelessness and poverty.
- Seek opportunities to build the capacity and sustainability of the organisation to further the above objectives.

From the Chair

Alison McClintock
Queensland Working Women's Service Inc (QWWS)
Management Committee Chairperson

We learned this year, when we asked through our networks, 'Is the Queensland Working Women's Service a valuable service for women?', that QWWS has many friends and supporters. It became apparent the support QWWS has provided to many thousands of women has not been forgotten and the community has sent a strong message to policy makers that QWWS and the Working Women's Centres must continue their work.

The service this year has again been at the forefront of policy around women's work issues, has contributed to academic research and social debates and has provided support and advocacy to over three thousand individual women.

Continuing high demand for services has been a challenge for the Management Committee in determining how we can support the operations of the service with a funding shortfall. Once again as in previous years this makes us examine what we do well and how we can do it better.

Over the four years that I have been in the position of QWWS Chair, I have seen the service grow and diversify and respond to challenges. I feel that we have a few challenges ahead with the changing context of industrial relations service provision and really believe that with proper resources QWWS can provide a model of service delivery that is relevant and efficient in addressing some of the concerns of vulnerable women workers.

A big thank-you to Kerriann Dear and to Deidre Morrow who acted as Director while Kerriann was on leave in 2007. Congratulations also to Teresa Chase who has been appointed as Senior Industrial Officer and to Deidre who is now the Young Worker's Advisory Service (YWAS) Coordinator. Janai Meizner has left QWWS after three years and now has a position with the Australian Medical Association. We thank Janai for all her hard work and congratulate her on her new role. All the staff have worked extremely hard in the face of constant legislative change to remain up to date and to ensure that QWWS delivers the best possible advice to our clients.

The YWAS has matured under our auspice and may head down the road of self-incorporation during 2009. I wish the YWAS Steering Committee all the best and look forward to seeing YWAS continue to develop to respond to the concerns of young working people.

Thank you also to the QWWS Committee and to our friends and families for helping us keep the service buoyant during a sometimes challenging year.

Management Committee

The QWWS has now operated for over 14 years with the ongoing commitment and work of a volunteer Management Committee. The Management Committee is made up of representatives from a broad range of organisations and individuals and meets every second month. The service relies on the volunteer efforts of this group of women who provide strategic direction and advice on management concerns.

Elected Management Committee 2007/2008

Alison McClintock, (Chair)	Ordinary/Individual member.
Anna Herzog, (Secretary)	Australian Services Union – Service Branch.
Behice Bagdas	Multicultural Development Association.
Kaye Broadbent	Griffith University.
Rosslyn Monro	Youth Advocacy Centre.
Julianna Virine (till Jan 2008)	Queensland Council of Unions.
Kerriann Dear (from Jan 2008)	Management Representative.
Deidre Morrow (till Jan 2008)	Management Representative.
Lee Matahaere	Staff Representative.

Other stakeholders/consultants

Loretta Gibbs	Financial Controller.
Sharon Large	YWAS up to Jan 2008.
Deidre Morrow	YWAS since Jan 2008.
Marjolein Broers	Department of Employment and Industrial Relations.

Committee achievements

July and September 2007 Strategic planning.
September 2007 Annual General Meeting.
January 2008 Policy and Procedure review commenced.

Director's Report

Kerriann Dear

While QWWS staff have been busy during 2007/2008 providing assistance to the thousands of women who rely on our service for industrial relations advice and support, we have also worked hard to maintain the voices of working women at a policy level. More than ever, and within a very dynamic industrial relations environment, we recognize the importance of keeping our interface with policy-makers real and relevant. QWWS has been invited this year to participate in a number of community and policy discussions and we have received strong positive feedback about the depth of our understandings of contemporary issues for working women and the importance of our advocacy role in assisting women to attain and maintain active and fulfilling working lives.

In the lead up to the election last November, (while I was on leave), Deidre Morrow and Sharon Large wrote to and contacted numerous federal candidates and sitting members to ensure that QWWS and the issues facing working women were on the political radar. The responses we received assured us that the work of QWWS and the Working Women's Centres were highly valued and issues such as work and family and workplace equity were on the agenda. Therefore it was surprising to receive news in April this year that the federal government had declined our proposal for funding to continue to support the work of the Working Women's Centres. This was a disappointing and trying time for QWWS as we attempted to understand the basis for this decision. However, we are hopeful that a pending review by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will recognise the value of our work and determine the complimentary role that we can have alongside Fair Work Australia to assist women to understand and uphold their workplace rights and obligations.

The Labor government has also brought a steady stream of attention to women's labour market issues, with the announcement of the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Paid Maternity Leave in February 2008, the Senate Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act and the The House of Representatives Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into Women's equal opportunities in the workforce including pay equity. QWWS together with the National Working Women's Centres have provided submissions to each of these national inquiries as well as comments on the National Employment Standards Exposure Draft.

The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission Inquiry into Pay Equity in 2007 provided an opportunity for QWWS to highlight some of the impacts of Workchoices and the current minimum wage setting apparatus on women's workforce participation and pay and conditions. We also attended two roundtables on Pay Equity facilitated by the Office for Women with other key national women's employment and policy stakeholders.

The Listening Tour that was conducted by the new Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Liz Broderick during April provided a valuable forum to raise and discuss gender based discrimination in women's employment as well as highlight the prevalence of sexual harassment particularly for young women in the workplace. QWWS and the Working Women's centres also made a significant contribution in relation to the specific issues surrounding sexual harassment in the workplace and the need for reform of the Federal Sex Discrimination Act through a joint submission prepared and endorsed by a range of leading women's organisations and women's equality specialists. This submission represented a collaborative vision for strengthening the equality framework in Australia, particularly through improvements to the *Sex Discrimination Act (SDA)*.

The Senior Industrial Officer's and the YWAS Coordinator's reports highlight some of the trends and issues for clients of QWWS and YWAS during the 2007/2008 period. This period traverses the Workchoices implementation and the Labor government reforms. Correspondingly this has seen our staff engaged in diligently gaining understanding of the new legislation and considering how it impacts on the workplace experiences of our particular clients and determines the courses of action available to them. The removal of unfair dismissal protections for employees in businesses with fewer than 100 employees continues to be one of the biggest issues for our clients in attaining job security and the right to a fair process around termination. We have also seen an increase in the use of short term and casualised employment, which seems to be aimed at employers avoiding their obligations around leave, particularly maternity leave.

The service has furthered our research partnership with Queensland University of Technology unearthing the structural discrimination and disadvantage faced by women in the labour market and publishing articles on sexual harassment in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resource Management* and on *Pregnancy Discrimination in the Industrial Relations Journal* during this period.

It is disturbing that more than twenty years after anti-discrimination and human rights legislation has been implemented that sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination and other forms of gender discrimination continue to be concerns for women in Queensland workplaces. While we have been successful in assisting women to obtain better outcomes either through conciliation or with direct employer negotiations, QWWS is aware of a high unmet need for advocacy services in the community such as those provided by QWWS. Our limited resources have once again meant that we have had to further tighten our criteria for women we assist at the intensive level and staff losses have meant that the service is now closed to clients for the full day on Thursdays.

The context of high demand for services with the refusal of federal funds provided the focus of the Management Committees meetings in the first part of the year and I would like to thank the Committee for their tenacity of commitment and understanding of our work. The Committee and staff have remained engaged and committed to high standards of service delivery and have consistently relied on their creativity, innovation and passion to fuel our demanding engine room. Thanks to the hard work and resilience of our team of staff, placements and volunteers we have managed this challenge. However, whilst committing almost 25% of our operating budget this year from our savings, the Management Committee have emphasised the unsustainable nature of the resourcing of the service and are resolved to lobby hard for appropriate funding, both the amount and recurrent in nature, for the future.

I believe that the staff, volunteers and committee of QWWS have successfully developed and maintained a vision for our service that will sustain us in the coming period and in the face of continued funding uncertainty.

The YWAS Steering Committee has also demonstrated its commitment to the sustainability of the service through a process that will likely lead the service to incorporation early in 2009. This will provide YWAS with the potential to operate independently and tender for its own resources and funding.

Staff 2007/2008

QWWS Director:	Kerriann Dear. Deidre Morrow (Acting till Jan 2008).
QWWS Senior Industrial Officer:	Teresa Chase (Acting).
QWWS Industrial Officer (IO):	Janai Meizner.
QWWS Intake/Industrial Officer:	Lee Matahaere.
QWWS Contract/casual IO's:	Mel Brewer, Tracey Onions.
YWAS Coordinator:	Sharon Large (till Jan 2008). Deidre Morrow (Acting Jan-July 2008).
YWAS Industrial Officer:	Andrew Marsden.
YWAS contract/casual IO's:	Mel Brewer, Nayda Hernandez.
Seconded Industrial Officer from DEIR:	Melinda Dickson.

Thank you to our staff

Volunteer Induction Program

The Volunteer Induction Program has been operating since the end of 2004. The volunteers undertaking the program are provided with a structured induction and/or placement to gain work experience in the areas of either administration or information, referral, advice and support to women and young people on all work related matters. At the end of the Industrial Officer program, the participants should be capable of performing an intake or advisory role.

Placements

We have been fortunate to have two placements from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations during this period – Toby Gazzard until January 2007 and currently Melinda Dickson.

Special Projects

Security for Women (S4W)

S4W is one of four National Secretariats advising the federal Office for Women on issues that affect all Australian women. S4W is concerned with the issues that impact on the lifelong economic well being of Australian women and advocate that long term economic wellbeing empowers women to make choices and enriches all aspects of their lives including education, health, employment, safety and financial wellbeing. Since 2005 QWWS has been an active participant of the S4W project as an organisational member.

QWWS attended the Roundtable on Pay Equity in Canberra on the 30 April 2008 on behalf of S4W. This was hosted and facilitated by the Federal Office for Women. The meeting was attended by the Minister for Women the Hon. Tanya Plibersek. The overall goal was to develop a framework that could guide a national approach to improving gender pay equity, identifying options, the roles of key stakeholders and possible structures and processes to maintain the momentum. A number of recommendations were endorsed at the meeting including the recommendation that women have access to assistance in understanding their rights at work and issues around pay equity such as the service already provided by the QWWS and the Working Women's Centres.

The QWWS Director was also invited on behalf of S4W to meet with the Minister Hon. Tanya Plibersek at the Smith Family Headquarters in Sydney on Wednesday 26 March 2008 to discuss current issues for women in Australia. Other organizations represented at the meeting included the Association of Women Educators and the National Foundation of Australian Women. The Minister expressed that communication with the Secretariats was very important and encouraged attendees to use this structure to raise any issues and agendas to improve the status of women.

Auspice of the Young Workers Advisory Service (YWAS)

QWWS continues to auspice YWAS. We are entering the final year of the three-year funding grant secured in July 2006. YWAS Steering Committee may move to incorporate the service in early 2009.

Workplace Negotiation Skills Workshops 2008

QWWS successfully tendered to the Queensland Government's Office for Women to deliver *Workplace Negotiation Skills* (WNS) seminars to women across Queensland from July to December 2008. WNS seminars are three and a half hour workshops that provide information and interactive workshop exercises.

The *Workplace Negotiation Skills* seminar aims to:

- Increase women's knowledge of minimum working conditions and rights;
 - Increase women's confidence in undertaking effective negotiations; and
- Increase the likelihood of employers and employees negotiating mutually beneficial agreements.

The outcomes will be reported in the next period.

Campaign for Federal Funding for the Working Women's Centres

There are currently Working Women's Centres (WWC's) in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Queensland. The Centres opened in SA in 1979 and in NT and Qld in 1994. The WWC's provide services to women who are in a disadvantaged bargaining position, insecure and low paid work with particular attention to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds.
- Women who have a disability.
- Women in regional, rural and remote areas.
- Women with family responsibilities.
- Women of mature age.
- Women negotiating a workplace agreement.
- Young women.

The WWC's have strong partnerships with other community organisations, government agencies, universities and unions and are experts on women and industrial relations issues. The WWC's have contributed to a range of research projects, have assisted unions with seeking award variations and made submissions to government inquiries representing women's issues at work. We play an important role in de-mystifying the industrial relations system and assist vulnerable women to understand the roles of government agencies and how to access their services.

Over the past 4 years the service has faced difficult and challenging funding situations with the former federal government, leading to the decision to reject the offer for funding made available under Workchoices in June 2006. However

**Queensland Working Women's Service Inc.
Annual Report 2007/2008**

this lead to a reduction in the availability of services to women. Some of this funding was picked up by the Queensland state government but we have operated with a reduced budget that has seen our service delivery cut by 30% and our regional offices in Far North and North Queensland close with staff redundancies.

In the lead up to and during the period of the Workchoices legislation, QWWS was at the forefront of identifying and publishing the negative impacts of the laws on women, convening the inaugural *Our Work Our Lives: national conference on women and industrial relations* in June 2006 which was then followed by a second conference in September 2007 convened by our sister centre in Adelaide. QWWS also conducted our own research as well as formed partnerships with Queensland University, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University providing significant data for prominent academic research about the impact of Workchoices on women and other vulnerable workers.

Currently the demands on the service for representation from women, particularly in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission are onerous, with the Commission requiring strict compliance to narrow time frames to prepare and allocate staff to cases. We are limited to representing only women in identified target groups often turning away cases on the basis of no availability.

After an extensive public campaign for federal funding for the three Working Women's Centres, only the Northern Territory and South Australian Working Women's Centres have received advice that they will be funded for the 2007/2008 year. The Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS) has not received any support from the federal government for the coming financial year and will face a funding deficit of more than \$90,000.

The three Working Women's Centres have been informed that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will conduct a review of the need for our services during the second half of 2008. This review will be used to inform the decision about ongoing funding beyond 2008.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE QUEENSLAND WORKING WOMEN'S SERVICE TO CONTINUE THEIR WORK AND GAIN FUNDING FOR 2008/9 FROM THE RUDD GOVERNMENT PLEASE SIGN OUR PETITION. Please visit:

<http://www.qwws.org.au/fundingPETITION/>

Young Worker's Advisory Service (YWAS) Coordinator's Report

Deidre Morrow

Sharon Large took leave from the position of YWAS Coordinator in January 2008 and resigned from the position in August 2008. In a relatively short period (just over 12 months) Sharon achieved much and left a strong legacy for me to uphold while I acted in the role and until my appointment in August. During this time, I can confirm through ongoing contacts with Government Departments, community organisations, schools and regional visits that YWAS has an exceptional reputation within these groups. My aim as the new Coordinator is to continue to guide YWAS from strength to strength ensuring that the services viability and credibility is maintained as well as making improvements wherever possible.

Over the last six months YWAS varied our approach to establishing and maintaining key relationships within the community through participation in various youth network meetings, many of which are facilitated by local government. We have found that meeting face to face with workers in the youth sector a great opportunity to promote YWAS and also learn from others working in the sector.

YWAS continue to provide information/educational sessions over and above our targets to a range of organisations including secondary schools.

The commitment and dedication that YWAS staff show to young people while supporting them through their experiences of workplace issues must be commended. We have a great team who have the skills and approaches that are relevant to YWAS client needs and the concerns of our client's parents, grandparents or caregivers.

Current Issues for Young People

Observations over many years continue to show that the main concerns occur for our clients when employers either ignorantly or deliberately fail to comply with contemporary employment practices, regulation and legislation. It appears some just make up their own rules with no regard for good business practice, fairness equity or even common sense. Cost shifting is one practice that has no place in the relationship of employer and employee. Note: Cost shifting involves practices such as requiring employees to provided their own equipment or pay for their own training for the job.

Service Delivery

YWAS has continued to meet its key performance indicators for specialised assistance and casework.

**Queensland Working Women's Service Inc.
Annual Report 2007/2008**

For the Period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008	
Total clients contacting for assistance	1656
Specialised Client Assistance	1252
General Client Assistance (basic information or Referral)	354
Information/ Educational sessions	57
Group satisfaction with information	99%
Media/promotional activities	83

For the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 (casework)	
Number of casework clients serviced	92
Timeliness of casework activities - % completed	98%
Client Satisfaction with casework services	99%

Advisory Line

The service continues to provide telephone support, information and advice to individual young workers in relation to verbal, emotional and financial abuse at work, discrimination at work, unfair and unlawful dismissal and other workplace injustice.

Information/education sessions

YWAS provided 57 information sessions to young workers this period. In previous years YWAS has focused on providing information/educational sessions in relation to employment issues to students within the mainstream educational system. However during this period, in addition to school talks, we have additionally targeted our information sessions to young people outside the mainstream system. YWAS has linked into *Get Set For Work Programs* and vocational education curriculums as well as targeting sessions to students who are studying Cert I in Workplace Education. YWAS has also been a guest speaker at various TAFE Institutes providing information to students enrolled in youth studies who are likely on completion to be supporting young people with various issues including employment related matters.

YWAS has exceeded the required key performance indicators in this area as per our current Funding Service Agreement. I would like to highlight that there is much time that does go into the coordination of school talks in an endeavour to deliver these sessions smoothly. I would like to thank Andrew Marsden for capably taking on this task.

Media Promotional Activities

Activities for this period:

- Media/Press Releases.
- Television and radio appearances.
- Mail out of promotional material such as brochures.
- Participating in various Network/Reference Group meetings.
- Radio Advertising for 13 weeks on 4ZZZ.

YWAS on Facebook

Melinda Dickson has undertaken the task of setting up and maintaining YWAS on Facebook in view of using relevant medium to reach young people.

Case Work

YWAS Industrial Officers have advocated on behalf of young people in both Industrial and Anti-Discrimination Commissions. YWAS has represented/advocated on behalf of young people in 92 cases over the previous twelve months.

Regional Visits

YWAS visited Far North and Central Queensland as well as Ipswich, the South Burnett region and the Gold and Sunshine Coasts.

Australian Research Council Project

This project was initiated in 2006 to investigate how young people learn about work. Project partners include Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Griffith University, Queensland Council of Unions, Education Queensland and Catholic Education. Teresa Chase has participated in a number of regional interviews, which will continue throughout 2008.

Youth Week Event

A concert was organized with sponsorship from YWAS, QUT Student Guild, Rocking Horse Records and Alchemix Studios on April 10 held at A Block Lawn Kelvin Grove QUT Campus. The Lineup included rock bands The Alchemists, New Manic Spree and The Cairos.

YWAS had an information stall set up at the event from which we widely distributed brochures and staff wore their YWAS T-shirts.

YWAS 6th Birthday

On the 15 April this year YWAS turned six years old. We celebrated YWAS's birthday in conjunction with the Youth Week event held at the Kelvin Grove Campus of the QUT.

Outreach Service

YWAS participated in an outreach model of service delivery with Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) for approximately 6 months. Following an assessment of workload, staff resources and outcomes this service was discontinued.

Whilst YWAS staff were based once a fortnight in the BYS Drop In Centre there was little to no demand for information, support, referrals, advocacy or representation to young people on employment issues as most of the concerns related to housing and health.

Future Directions

- Continued participation in Youth network meetings.
- Regional visits to schools and community services.
- Participation in activities for Youth Week 2009.
- Continued promotion of YWAS.
- Move toward YWAS incorporation.

I would like to express sincere thanks to previous and current members of the YWAS Steering Committee in this period for their ongoing participation and support. We look forward to your continued involvement over the next year.

YWAS Steering Committee Members:

Nyree Hatzlmlhail – Cannon Hill Anglican College

David Powell – Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ)

Nick Tindley – National Retail Association

Joan Schmidt – Department of Education Training and the Arts

Carolynne Berry – Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR)

Matthew Simpson – Commission for Children and Young People

James Hudson – University of Qld

Jonathon Scott -DEIR

Rebecca Smith

Chris Doyle

Sarah Dawson

Rebekah Jensen

Michelle Robson –Nichol Robinson Halletts

Leata Nolan

Judi - CAYS

Rosslyn Monro - YAC

Vivienne Braddock - CCYPCG

Catherine Moynihan – Legal Aid

Sharon Large

Kerriann Dear – Qld Working Women's Service Inc

QWWS Senior Industrial Officers' Report

Teresa Chase

Service Delivery:

During the reporting period QWWS provided a telephone advisory service between 9am and 4pm Monday Tuesday Wednesday and Friday's and 9am to 1pm Thursdays. On 12 May 2008 QWWS began closing the advisory line on Mondays until 11am to allow for staff meetings.

Client demand for services via the operation of the advisory line remained steady. From 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008, QWWS responded to **3672** queries from women in Queensland and assisted **137** women with representation or intensive support during the period.

Despite restricted capacity with no further Department of Justice and Attorney General project funding, QWWS provided casework assistance (including casework level 1 and 2) to over 30 women with matters involving sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace during the period. Many of these were raised as unlawful terminations through the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC).

During the period, QWWS assisted casework clients in recovering \$204,038.00 by way of entitlements or compensation for unfair dismissal or discrimination. Reinstatement, apologies and the provision of positive references were also sought and achieved by many clients.

Hearings

QWWS has progressed one client to a full hearing at the AIRC this year. QWWS has represented the client in two successful jurisdictional hearings in the AIRC. The matter is currently awaiting conciliation and may require further jurisdictional hearings before being finalized. Representing clients at hearings provides QWWS staff with the opportunity to further hone their advocacy and research skills.

Referrals and partnerships for casework

During the period, QWWS maintained and developed a number of referral partnerships for those clients who QWWS are unable to assist further. This may include clients who wish to progress their complaints to a tribunal hearing, those who need higher-level legal advice, or callers who fall outside our target groups.

QWWS has maintained our long-term referral relationships with Hall Payne Lawyers and Nicoll Robinson Halletts. This year we have also developed referral relationships with Copeland Workplace Law and Robert Stevenson from Nathan Lawyers. Both of these firms have provided assistance to QWWS clients as well as to our Industrial Officers when we have required expert legal opinions on industrial matters.

Community outreach to women on workplace issues.

During the period, QWWS delivered 20 training seminars and information sessions to groups of women in the community to increase awareness of workplace issues, preparing for and re-entering work and negotiating skills in the workplace.

Many of these sessions were Negotiation Skills seminars. This consisted of a seminar series developed in partnership with Queensland Government, Office for Women to assist women get better outcomes at work by learning and applying some essential negotiation skills.

Other seminars and workshops QWWS presented during the period include:

- A series of four guest lectures to Griffith University Industrial Relations students on both the Gold Coast and Nathan campuses in April.
- Workplace Bullying Seminars for Centacare employees (through Positive Workplace Practices)
- Rights at work seminar for the Qld Deaf Society
- Facilitation of information sessions for Queensland Association of School Tuck shops
- Presentation of research paper on returning to work from maternity leave at the Adelaide 'Our Work, Our Lives' conference on women and industrial relations.

Client Statistics

How many clients have we helped?

Over the 12 months 2007/2008 QWWS received a total of **3672 client queries**. These included **2380** specialised assistance calls, **137** casework and **1214** general query clients.

Client background

- 1.1% of clients were from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.
- 6.34 % of clients were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- 74 % of clients were from an English-speaking background.
- The remainder did not identify.

Where do our clients live?

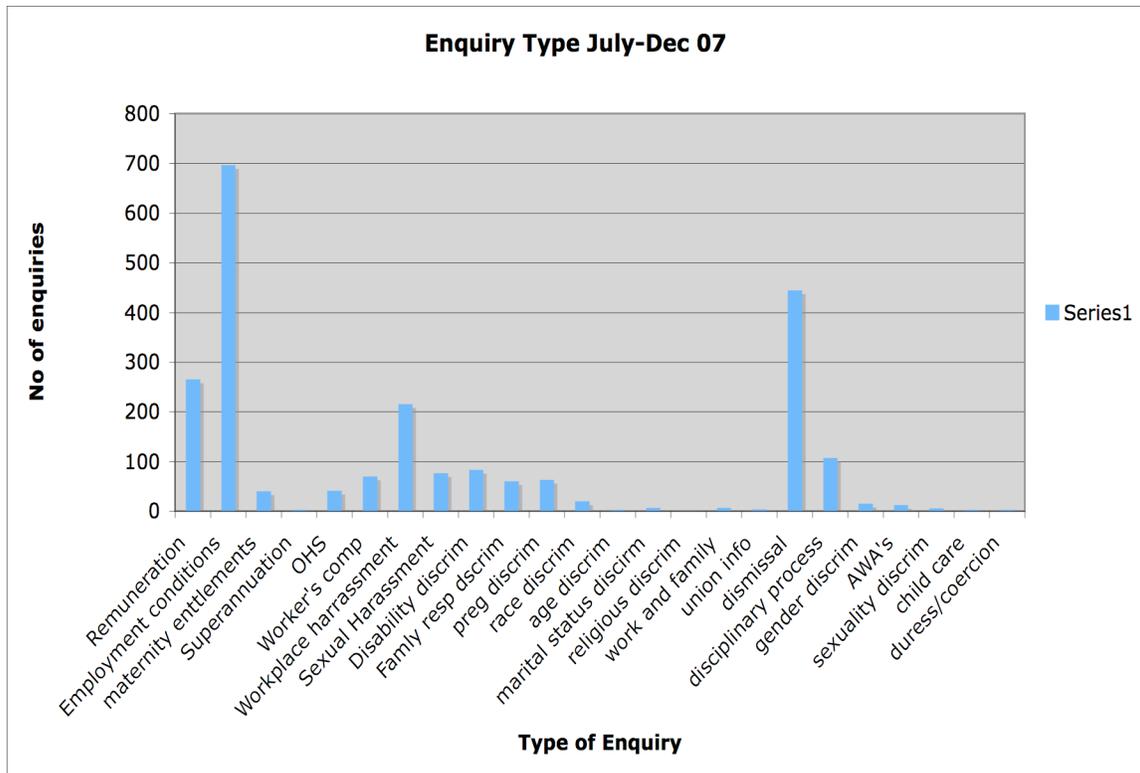
- 57.07% of client queries came from rural and regional areas
- 20.73% came from the Brisbane city area.
- 22.2% of client queries did not identify their residence.

What were the issues our clients called about?

The majority of QWWS callers called about dismissal, discrimination or workplace harassment. Naturally, clients will often call about more than one issue.

The new QWWS/YWAS database has enabled us to draw more complex data for reporting purposes. For example, we are able to report that of the 19.76% of specialized assistance enquiries in the 6 month period of 1 Jan to 30 June 2008 that were about dismissals, 52.83% were about 'unfair' dismissals and 33.65% were about 'unlawful' dismissals. 5.35% were about 'constructive' dismissals. See the graph below for a detailed summary of the issue clients called about in the Jul to Dec 2007.

Graph



Client Feedback

QWWS conducted regular client evaluations of casework clients and education/information sessions. Of clients surveyed:

- 96.5% Group satisfaction with Information/educational sessions**
- 96.5 % Casework clients agreed that QWWS staff conducted themselves in a professional manner.**

Some comments from clients include:

"I was able to follow the guidelines which the Industrial Officer informed me about during our telephone conversations"

"I was given excellent advice, particularly in terms of seeking a Certificate of Employment and having the termination recorded as my resignation. Obviously QWWS Industrial Officers have very heavy workloads. The availability of officers could not be guaranteed because of this. It would be good if QWWS could employ more Industrial Officers to assist with the heavy workload."

"The pre-conciliation preparation I was given enabled me to represent myself. It gave me the direction and information I needed."

Media/Promotional Activities

QWWS engaged in 29 media and promotional activities in the 2007/8 year, including:

- Visits to Emerald, Mt Morgan, Blackwater, Clermont and Capella (in conjunction with the YWAS ARC project) to disseminate QWWS material, talk to local community groups and local government agencies.
- Creating links to QWWS website through various MP's websites
- Media releases concerning the effects of WorkChoices on women workers, Pregnancy Discrimination and Work and Family issues.
- Running a stall at the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops' expo.

Other projects:

Pay equity submission

QWWS provided a submission to the QIRC inquiry into Pay Equity early in the period. This submission focused on the impact of the federal Government's Work Choices amendments to the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* on the legislative measures addressing pay equity under the federal and state systems. It provided case studies on bargaining power and how the individualisation of the employment relationship might disproportionately affect women. It also looked at the impacts of the Work Choices amendments on pay in female-dominated industries.

Paid Maternity Leave Campaign

This year QWWS has focused much of its attention on the campaign for universal Paid Maternity Leave. QWWS made a written submission to the Productivity Commission Enquiry and launched a web petition to support the campaign (www.qwws.org.au/phpPETITION). The Petition currently has almost 1000 signatures. The petition will be presented to the Prime Minister

and Minister for Education Employment and Workplace Relations towards the end of 2008.

Australian Labour Law Association paper

Mel Brewer (QWWS Industrial Officer) and Teresa Chase (QWWS Senior Industrial Officer) started work on a paper to be presented to the 2008 Australian Labour Law Association conference in Melbourne in November 2008. This paper will look at women with sexual harassment complaints and their experiences of conciliation processes at anti-discrimination and human rights commissions. This paper will consider the idea that women are comfortable with and less vulnerable in conciliatory dispute resolution processes, and ask questions about who most benefits from conciliation.

Our Work, Our Lives

During the 2007/8 year, QWWS industrial officers Janai Meizner and Teresa Chase presented a paper at the 'Our Work, Our Lives' conference held in Adelaide South Australia. This paper looked how women fare on attempting to return to work after maternity or parental leave. The paper identified and analysed some of the major impediments to women as they return to the workforce after taking time to have children.

Current Issues for Working Women

Kerriann Dear

Sexual Harassment (from the QWWS contribution to the submission to the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) Review 2008 endorsed by National Women's Groups.)

It is difficult to extrapolate how widespread the problem of sexual harassment is across Australia, but in her recent report *Gender equality: what matters to Australian women and men (The Listening Tour Community Report)* the Sex Discrimination Commissioner identified reports of sexual harassment in every site, industry and workplace that she visited. Further action to prevent and respond to sexual harassment particularly in the workplace is imperative.

A review of the effectiveness of the SDA in eliminating discrimination and promoting gender equality must acknowledge that despite increased community awareness of the problem since the implementation of the SDA, sexual harassment is a continuing problem in many workplaces with existing complaints mechanisms and processes obviously failing to serve as a sufficient deterrent.

The Working Women's Centres (WWCs) (South Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland) provide advisory and advocacy services to women on employment-related matters and have identified that one of the most common concerns reported by women to the WWCs is the inadequate way in

which their employers and supervisors handled their complaint or concerns about sexual harassment.

The status of sexual harassment as unlawful under the SDA does not act as sufficient deterrent to sexual harassment occurring nor is this unlawful status sufficient to ensure appropriate courses of action when a complaint is made within a workplace context despite the fact that policies and procedures may exist in organisations.

Many women contacting the WWCs, in particular young, lower skilled and precariously employed women, report to the centres that they feel that they have no alternative but to resign or take periods of leave after experiencing sexual harassment, especially when the harassment is ongoing. The WWCs have also documented numerous cases where the woman has complained internally and the ultimate result is that she is compensated or paid out to terminate her employment but the harasser remained in employment with the organisation and in some cases was promoted or moved sideways.

It follows that women contacting the WWCs for assistance with sexual harassment complaints may be only be the 'tip of the ice berg', representing a small percentage of women who experience harassment and who decide to enquire about possible complaints mechanisms, rights to redress or to receive support for their situation.

A study published in 2008 which examined sexual harassment data from the QWWS¹ asserted that recognising the full range of behaviours and sources associated with sexual harassment, as well as taking decisive and appropriate action where it occurs, is an essential prerequisite to allowing women to overcome unequal labour market opportunities that are based on imbalanced power relations. Stronger legislation is needed to compel employers to take responsibility for the actions of their employees and take proactive measures to prevent and respond appropriately to internal complaints

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¹ McDonald, P., Backstrom, S. and Dear, K. 2008, 'Sexual Harassment: Quid pro quo versus hostile environment claims and progression to formal redress'. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Human Resource Management*