

of concern, especially in relation to rehabilitating injured staff.

**'IR SYSTEM IS MOVING BACKWARDS': LASA**

Patrick Reid, CEO of Leading Age Services Australia (LASA), says the current application by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to amend all modern awards to include a minimum four-hour shift length would be a retrograde step for staffing and rostering flexibility and would push up costs for home care employers.

"This goes against the very foundations of consumer directed home care that serve to enable people to remain at home for longer because they can access the care and assistance they need as and when they need it," he says.

"Instead of moving towards increased options for consumers – and importantly, employees – at a time when society expectations are for more flexibility, not less, our IR system is moving backwards."

Mr Reid says potential solutions would be to create an enterprise agreement, or an individual flexibility agreement, specific to age services, which would negotiate alternative arrangements to award conditions without reducing an employee's entitlements.

"As an industry, aged services need an option for an employer and employee to opt out of the modern award system and create an arrangement they agree to, which matches the need of the service being delivered and the needs of our ageing population."

ACSA CEO John Kelly says the potential for further casualisation of the workforce under CDC would not be in the interests of consumers, employers or workers, and should be monitored closely.

However, he says it is too early to get a clear picture of the full implications and risks to emerge for the aged care workforce.

ACSA's workforce position paper released in April also identified as a priority area the need to modernise industrial arrangements to enable providers to respond to a consumer-driven model, including designing contemporary enterprise agreements.

Helen Gibbons, assistant national secretary of United Voice, says the union is concerned that provider requests for more flexible working arrangements could deteriorate working conditions if it means less hours and/or less predictable hours for staff. "In a sector which is notorious for low pay this would make earning sufficient income to live on even more difficult."

She says for CDC to be effective, government funding has to be adequate. ■

CASE STUDY:

Community Care Options

**From clients taking part in staff selection and training, to transforming how workers and clients are matched, the philosophy of consumer directed care is having a profound impact on how one service provider is managing its workforce.**

**E**nhanced consumer choice and control means clients at Community Care Options now have a seat on staff selection panels and a say in the interview questions that are asked of prospective employees.

Liz Anscombe, the organisation's operations manager, says a pool of clients has undertaken basic HR training and is available to sit on recruitment panels as a consumer representative.

Involving consumers in the recruitment process sends a clear message that their opinions matter and clients should feel empowered to give their feedback, Anscombe says

"It can be quite confronting for some applicants but I think it is a really positive thing to know from the outset that as a staff member you're not just committing to an organisation but to an individual," she tells *Community Care Review*.

Some aged care and disability clients also open up their homes to participate in paid staff trials, where clients are asked to critique how they feel about a prospective employee.

Feedback is collated from the client and staff observing the applicant to determine whether the person proceeds to employment with the organisation. Anscombe describes this as passing the 'client test'.

Other clients have also developed their own training plans specific to their particular needs, which they implement with their carer.

With clients being encouraged to exercise greater choice and control over their care, including the voice of the consumer in recruitment practices and training is another way of empowering clients, she says.



Liz Anscombe

**THE RIGHT MATCH**

As part of the NSW provider's review of its workforce, Community Care Options also undertook a skills and interests audit of its staff to more appropriately match clients' needs with suitable workers.

New and existing staff were quizzed on their hobbies and interests, and what they were passionate about in life, which unearthed a number of hidden skills and talents.

"For example, through this process we discovered that a young female staff member had been involved in cadet training and had a strong interest in military weaponry. I would have never paired her a few years ago with an older gentleman who was a war veteran, but those two clicked over their common interests," she says.

"It has been quite remarkable in terms of the relationships that have developed. We realised that in the past we had made assumptions that were incorrect, but by asking a few questions we've been able to be more creative in our matches."

In order to be responsive to consumer choices and preferences, Community Care Options has also developed targeted strategies to diversify its workforce to include more men and young people.

While there may be pressure to casualise the workforce to achieve the flexibility required of CDC, Anscombe says her organisation has made the decision to move to a more permanent workforce to cement itself as an employer of choice.

"In a changed marketplace where there is lots of competition, it is vote of confidence." Approximately 80 per cent of the organisation's 170 staff are permanent, up from 50 per cent, she says. ■

By Linda Belardi