

# Human resources needed to give effect to children's right to social services

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**T**he Children's Act (No 38 of 2005), as amended by the Children's Amendment Bill [B19F- 2006], requires a range of social service practitioners to deliver social services to children in the areas of partial care, early childhood development, prevention and early intervention, protection, foster care, adoption and child and youth care centres. These services are labour intensive, and effective delivery is dependent on the availability of skilled practitioners in the relevant disciplines. This includes social workers, child and youth care workers and early childhood development practitioners. However, there is a critical shortage of personnel in these categories, and if not addressed as a priority, effective implementation of the Children's Act will not be possible. In this essay an attempt is made to clarify some of the challenges and identify possible solutions.

This essay:

- explains the different categories of people needed to provide social services;
- looks at why there is a critical shortage of the human resources needed for social services;
- discusses what the government is doing to address the human resource crisis;
- comments on what else can be done to address the human resource crisis; and
- describes the challenges to service delivery by child and youth care workers and early childhood development workers.

## What are the different categories of people needed to provide social services?

Categories of social service personnel needed to implement the Children's Act include:

**Social workers** who work with other occupational groups and community members to provide a wide range of protective, preventive and developmental services to children and

families. In helping people improve their social functioning, social workers focus particularly on people's interaction with their social environment.

To register, a social worker needs a four-year degree or diploma. According to the South African Council for Social Service Practitioners (SACSSP) there were 12,252 registered social workers and 835 social work students in 2007. This figure represents the total number of registered social workers but does not distinguish between those in private and public practice; nor does it indicate the number of social workers who work in children's social services as opposed to social services for other vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

**Social auxiliary workers** are trained over a one-year period. They help and work under the supervision of social workers. In 2007, the SACSSP recorded 1,455 fully registered and 2,077 conditionally registered (trainee) social auxiliary workers.

**Probation officers** work for the best interests of children in conflict with the law. They divert children away from the criminal justice system and help address the child's problems as revealed by the criminal behaviour. Diversion can include transferring cases to the Children's Court and associated social services in recognition that many children in conflict with the law are also in need of care and protection.

Probation work is a specialisation within social work, and will remain so for the present, although there has been debate on whether it should be treated as a separate profession.

**Assistant probation officers** are emerging as a new category of workers within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). They will probably be registered at the auxiliary level.

**Child and youth care workers** (CYCWs) traditionally work in residential care centres (now called Child and Youth Care Centres) and their role is now expanded to providing prevention and early intervention services to children at a

community level. Child and youth care work is an emerging field of service in South Africa and involves the delivery of developmental and therapeutic services within the life-space of the child.

A professional qualification as a CYCW takes four years at a centre of higher learning.

**Auxiliary child and youth care workers** assist CYCWs. Many have a National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) basic qualification, and are now engaged in SAQA-accredited training in child and youth care work.

There are no current statistics on the numbers of CYCWs. In 1996 the Inter-ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk estimated that there were at least 6,000 professional and auxiliary CYCWs actively employed in South Africa. It can be assumed that there would be more than this number at present.

The challenges facing CYCWs and their auxiliaries are discussed in more detail later in this essay.

**Early Childhood Development (ECD) workers** care for and promote the holistic development of young children in partial care facilities and ECD programmes. The Department of Social Development is responsible for providing for children from birth to five and these are the children legislated for under the Children's Act. The Department of Education is responsible for children in Grade R (the reception year for six-year-olds before primary schooling). ECD is seen as strategic and important in many government programmes, including the EPWP. ECD workers fall between the education and social service professions and it is still unclear where they will be located.

The most recent national survey in 2000, conducted by the Department of Education, identified 54,503 ECD workers. ECD workers are not registered or monitored and come from a range of backgrounds. The survey found that 88% of ECD workers had no training, inadequate training or unrecognised training. The qualifications of the small percentage of ECD practitioners at a professional level vary. Previous professional qualifications have been subsumed into a B.Ed. (Foundation Phase) degree. Previously available certificates will be replaced by the Further Education and Training (FET) Certificate in ECD in 2008.

The challenges facing ECD workers are discussed in more detail later.

**Community development workers** mobilise communities and facilitate processes so that communities can meet their basic needs and further their development. Some community development workers, selected and trained as

part of a national programme of the Department of Public Service and Administration, are employed by local authorities in the areas where they live. In terms of the Children's Act, there is potential for such workers to be deployed in the development of prevention and early intervention services and drop-in centres for vulnerable children.

Community development workers have varied qualifications, ranging from very basic training, auxiliary level training to professional degrees.

**Social security personnel** are employed by the South African Agency for Social Security and assess and process grant applications. They should also be referring families in need to social services.

**Practitioners from other sectors** such as nurses, specialist teachers, occupational therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists are commonly needed for the delivery of holistic services to children. Provisions for referral to such persons are much stronger in the Children's Act than in the Child Care Act (No 74 of 1983) which it will replace, and have great potential for improving the lives of children.

**Court personnel, the police and other personnel from the justice system** are also essential in the social services chain and need to be sensitised to the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Protocols and structural provision to ensure the efficient co-ordination of multi-disciplinary services are also crucial.

**Administrators, drivers, cleaners, cooks and other support staff** in children's services could be trained to assist in addressing the emotional and physical needs of children whom they encounter in the course of their work.

**Managers** are needed to manage delivery of social services. Lack of management expertise is a common problem within children's services.

**Volunteers** are often initially the direct providers of a service before organisations become professionalised and most non-profit organisations (NPOs) continue to rely to some extent on their help. Voluntary service is now being seen as a stepping stone to future formal employment, with skills development an essential component.

For the implementation of the Children's Act, attention and funding need to be directed to the recognition, training and development of all these categories of workers. Of particular urgency, however, is the need to address the challenges impeding the development, recruitment, retention and proper deployment of social workers, CYCWs and ECD workers.

## Why is there a critical shortage of the human resources needed for social services?

### There is a shortage of social workers

The Children's Bill costing by Barberton in 2006 provides some worrying figures. In 2005, there were 11,372 registered social workers in South Africa. Less than half (5,063) of these were employed by the Department of Social Development or NPOs to deliver social services to vulnerable groups, including children. The costing revealed that at the lowest level of implementation of the (then) Children's Bill, at least 16,504 social workers will be needed in 2010/11 for children's social services alone. Looking at the higher level of implementation, 66,329 social workers will be needed in 2010/11.

Two years after the costing report, the total number of registered social workers had risen to 12,252, which represents a 7.7% increase in the number of social workers since 2005.<sup>1</sup> However, based on the 2005 figures, it can be assumed that only half of these are employed by the Department of Social Development or NPOs involved in social services.

There are clearly not nearly enough social workers in South Africa to deal with the huge demands for services caused by widespread social problems. In addition, many social workers are spending most of their time processing orphaned children who are living with relatives through the court-based foster care system. The 2000/2001 annual report of the Department of Social Development states that 49,843 children were in foster care by April 2000. In comparison, administrative data from the department for May 2007 show that 398,068 children were receiving the FCG. This is an increase of 700% between 2002 and 2007.

In the absence of adequate social security for families, social workers need to use the complex and time-consuming court-based system to access income support for poor families. This means social workers have very little time left to deal with reported cases of child abuse as is illustrated in the two child abuse cases below, which were reported to Childline.

## There is poor recognition of other social service practitioners

In the past, social workers were considered the main providers of social services. To address the apartheid legacy and in recognition of the great need, South Africa committed to a developmental approach to social welfare. (See the essay on the policy framework on page 29). The Children's Act shifts social service delivery to the broader context of the developmental social welfare model and prescribes a new range of social services. The delivery of these is dependent on intensive up-scaling of human resources capacity.

The official view appears to be that increasing human resources capacity involves both the up-scaling of the numbers of persons providing services and a diversification of the range of recognised and regulated social service professions. But movement in this direction has been slow. For example, no category other than child and youth care work has as yet been accepted by the SACSSP as a separate occupational group distinct from social workers.

Without a statutory regulatory framework, social service occupations other than social workers will not be able to make a significant contribution to the implementation of the Children's Act.

There are however currently processes under way which will impact on the future of occupational groups that make up the social service work force:

- A long overdue redrafted Social Service Professions Bill should be processed by Parliament in 2008. The draft allows the Minister of Social Development to designate the social service professions and amend their scope. It also identifies key functions for the SACSSP in education and training of social service practitioners. These functions are covered by the existing legislation but have been spelled out much more clearly in the new Bill.
- Steered by the SACSSP, the boundaries between the relevant occupational groups are in the process of being clarified.

## CASE STUDIES 7 and 8: No response after child rape was reported

**CASE STUDY 7:** On 10 October 2003 it was reported [to Childline] that a 10-year-old child was being raped on an ongoing basis by relatives of her foster parent. The case was referred to the local Department of Social Development. Fifteen months later there was still no response.

**CASE STUDY 8:** A six-year-old child was severely raped by her uncle, and experienced difficulty walking. Although she was treated at the hospital, the mother did not report the case. On 15 March 2004 the case was referred to the local Department of Social Development for investigation. Ten months later there was still no response.

Source: Childline (2005) *Report on children's rights and child protection management in South Africa*, 14 January 2005. Presentation to Portfolio Committee on Social Development, KwaZulu-Natal provincial legislature.

<sup>1</sup> The increase was calculated using figures from the Children's Bill costing report in 2005 and from the South African Council for Social Service Professions in 2007.

### **NPOs deliver services but insecure funding leads to high staff turnover**

Most provincial departments of social development delegate the bulk of their social services to NPOs. However, subsidies paid to NPOs are not related to the actual costs of services. Many NPO services receive no subsidies at all. NPO services are insecure because of insecure funding, while valuable time and money is spent fundraising from non-government sources.

NPOs also experience extremely high staff turnover because remuneration is not standardised within the sector and because the government pays higher salaries to social service practitioners in the public service than NPOs can afford to pay their practitioners. Lakehaven Child and Youth Care Centre in Durban for example reported that in 2007 a third of its CYCWs left to work in government, which offers a starting monthly salary of R4,500 compared to the NPO's R2,500.

High staff turnover results in poor continuity and erratic delivery of social services which has a damaging impact on children in general. For children urgently in need of protection or who have been traumatised by abuse or neglect, it is disastrous.

### **What is the government doing to address the human resources crisis?**

Some of the government's current initiatives to address the shortage of social (and auxiliary) workers are described below.

#### **The Children's Act provides for a range of social service practitioners**

The Act allows for "social service professionals" to undertake certain tasks, notably monitoring long-term foster care cases and assessing partial care centres and drop-in centres for registration. Under the Child Care Act only social workers can undertake these tasks, which caused major service delivery delays due to the lack of social workers.

Note however that it will be important for the definition of 'social service professional' in section 1 of the Act to be revised somewhat in that it presently, no doubt unintentionally, excludes social workers from the definition and therefore excludes them from undertaking such tasks. The term 'professionals' is also too narrow for the broad range of people needed.

### **Retention and Recruitment Strategy for Social Workers**

This 2006 strategy of the Department of Social Development aims to address the many underlying causes of the shortage of social workers. Criticisms of this generally positive strategy are that it only covers social workers, that it is not large enough in scale to meet the need, that it is focused on government's needs rather than those of the whole sector; and that it does not address the salary gap between the department and NPOs.

#### **Training and deployment of social auxiliary workers**

In 2007, there was a government agreement with Cuba to use its rapid social work training programme. The plan is to train and deploy 9,360 social auxiliary workers by 2010. While this sounds like a positive move, there is some concern among local social service professionals about how the process will unfold. Monitoring will be needed.

#### **Training and deployment of probation officers and assistant probation officers**

This involves the training of social workers to serve as probation officers, and of young volunteers to assist them. In 2006/07 the department aimed to train 600 probation officers, 40 assistant probation officers and 200 voluntary assistant probation officers.

These initiatives are constructive and imaginative but there is still a desperate need to re-examine existing service models so as to deploy scarce social service staff to the maximum benefit of children and other vulnerable groups.

### **What else can be done to address the human resource crisis?**

#### **A new funding model for NPO social services**

It is most important that the current funding models for NPO social services are re-examined. There is wide consensus that, at the very least, the core elements of services mandated by the law must be bought in full by government. Adequate and dependable core funding would enable the sector to pay reasonable salaries and to direct resources into maintaining and improving services.

#### **A new model to support relatives caring for children**

Several major NPO networks and academics are calling for a new model of care for orphans and vulnerable children who are living permanently with their relatives. This would involve an administrative rather than a statutory court-based approach to provide these families with social assistance grants like the Child Support Grant, as well as community-based support programmes, discussed below.

### Massive roll-out of community-based prevention and early intervention programmes

A massive roll-out of community-based prevention and early intervention programmes (see the Isibindi model in the case study as an example) would free scarce social worker time and reduce the need for statutory interventions. Community programmes could be part of existing local Child Care Forums and be built into the Integrated Development Plans of local governments.

Catering for vulnerable children and families should involve the full range of social service professionals, assisted by personnel in other categories and volunteers. In particular, the challenges impeding the development of CYCWs and ECD workers should be addressed.

### What are the challenges to service delivery by child and youth care workers?

In addition to their traditional role in child and youth care centres, CYCWs are key to the delivery of a range of prevention and early intervention services, as is evident in case study 9 below.

### Clarify the status of child and youth care work

There has been a long delay in the finalisation of regulations to govern the occupation of CYCWs, which were drafted by the Professional Board for Child and Youth Care after a thorough

consultation process. Once these are finalised, CYCWs will be able to register with the SACSSP. This will enable them to qualify as social service professionals in terms of the Children's Act. SACSSP discussions about the demarcation of the social service professions may move the process forward in the coming months.

### Strategy for recruiting and training CYCWs

While child and youth care work is included in the EPWP, the Department of Social Development currently has no plan to up-scale training of CYCWs, and it should therefore develop a recruitment and development plan for child and youth care work. Reliable data on the number of CYCWs will be needed to plan an up-scale of skills. There is also a need to address the lack of career-pathing for CYCWs in government.

For the professional development of CYCWs, it is essential to make training and development accessible. Only one training institution, the Durban University of Technology, offers the four-year CYCW degree.

### Up-scale training and development for auxiliary child and youth care workers

The NACCW has experience and is positioned through a network of trainers to implement a rapid up-skilling process. It is offering training for the FET Certificate in Child and Youth Care countrywide. Other service providers are also entering the field, and qualified trainers and sufficient funding are needed to carry this out on the required scale.

## CASE STUDY 9 : The role of child and youth care workers in the Isibindi model

In response to the need for community-based services to vulnerable children, the NACCW developed the Isibindi model, which provides for unemployed community members to be trained to become CYCWs. They are employed in their own communities to provide comprehensive services to children in children's own homes. Communities are developed by offering opportunities for improving the circumstances of both service recipients and service providers. The model is an expression of the mentorship scheme for child-headed households provided for in section 137 of the Children's Amendment Bill.

Services offered by Isibindi CYCWs:

- Help children stay in school by getting fee exemptions, uniforms and books, helping with home work, going to school meetings and getting care for younger siblings.
- Help children to get health services, for example immunisation or antiretrovirals.
- Help children to get government benefits like social grants.
- Give psychosocial support, for example grief work.

- Teach life skills such as nutrition, hygiene, planning, and parenting.
- Make sure wills are in place to protect property and guardianship.
- Help with income-generation projects.
- Network to get resources.
- Referral for psychological support, social work support, or rehabilitation.

Currently, 419 CYCWs work in 25 sites in seven provinces to provide services to over 15,000 children living in poverty and affected by HIV/AIDS, who would otherwise not have access to social services.

A hallmark of the Isibindi model is its emphasis on partnerships with other social service professions. CYCWs mediate between families and the social service system. Ground-level work by CYCWs is verified by social workers – saving resources and time. "We work together, and know each other's roles. The social workers respect us; they refer cases to us, and there is no problem in our working together," says Pat Maqina, a CYCW in the Northern Cape.

Source: Loffell J, Allsopp M & Atmore E (2008) *Human resources needed to give effect to children's right to social services*. Paper commissioned by the Children's Institute, UCT. Available: [www.ci.org.za](http://www.ci.org.za).

### **Address over-extended staff and standardise remuneration**

Currently CYCWs in the NPO sector are employed without reference to a standardised remuneration scale. This is particularly the case with auxiliary workers who are often exploited, some being paid only R800 per month. It is also not unusual for a CYCW in an NPO child and youth care centre to care for 30 – 40 children, and workers in the NPO sector often work up to 100 hours per week.

### **What are the challenges to service delivery by early childhood development workers?**

The Department of Education provided Grade R (ECD in the reception year before school) to 487,525 children in 2007.<sup>2</sup> This should be seen in relation to the Grade R cohort of 945,000 children who need to be accommodated by 2010. (Education White Paper 5, clauses 4.1.1.6 and 4.1.2.2.). Apart from Grade R, the development of essential ECD services tends to be community driven and delivered by NPOs. A survey by the Department of Education in 2000 showed that 57% of ECD services were in community-based sites, 30% in home-based sites and 13% in school-based sites.

### **Strategy for recruiting and training ECD workers**

As mentioned, most practitioners working with children at approximately 24,000 ECD centres are untrained, under-trained or inappropriately trained. The Children's Amendment Bill makes skills and training necessary for registration of ECD facilities, even for home-based and informal sites. The Bill however provides for conditional registration of programmes that are not fully compliant, which could create training opportunities.

The non-profit sector historically provides about 90% of ECD training, mostly of workers already employed at ECD centres. It has the capacity to train some 2,000 educators each year. Unlike FET colleges, substantial follow-up support to trainees is offered. The FET colleges annually train some 1,000 – mostly pre-service – candidates. There is a National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development (2005 – 2010) in place, led by the Department of Education. It provides for skills development for at least two practitioners per site in 5,000 registered and subsidised sites in 2006/07, and for extending training to 5,400 unregistered sites in 2007/08. Currently 7,332 practitioners in subsidised ECD sites are in training.<sup>3</sup> But there is no educator development strategy or programme for the ECD sector that take into account overall need. Education and Training SETA learnerships are minimal, and while the EPWP targets some 19,800 educators, few have

yet been trained. This is clearly inadequate, given that an estimated 50,000 new entrants to the ECD sector are needed to meet the demand.<sup>4</sup>

A training and development strategy for ECD personnel is urgent, as is advocacy for professional recognition of ECD workers. The lack of a clear regulatory framework for ECD personnel inhibits planning and action. The current SACSSP demarcation process could lay the foundation for rapid development of human capacity in this vital field.

### **Address poor pay and working conditions of ECD workers**

There is no minimum wage for ECD workers and these educators are exploited. The survey in 2000 found that almost half of ECD workers earned less than R500 per month. Low salaries, no benefits, poor working conditions such as long hours, and the insecurity of working for a "community project" result in high staff turnover.

### **Support for home-based ECD**

In many cases, home-based ECD programmes, which make up 30% of all ECD programmes, are not registered with the provincial social development departments and receive no funding, training or other forms of support. It is important that caregivers who fall in this category are taken into account in planning for training and development.

### **What are the conclusions?**

Implementing the Children's Act requires that human resources capacity be increased and developed for all the service areas provided for in the Act. NPOs provide the bulk of existing services, and require realistic and dependable financing to sustain and increase their contribution. The government is responsible for ensuring the provision of the relevant services and, as it relies on the NPO sector for delivery, should at least be contributing the core funding needed for NPOs to continue their work. At present the organisations on which children depend for social services are crippled by chronic financial instability, resulting in them being unable to attract and retain skilled staff. To address this instability, the government should provide for the remuneration of NPO staff at the same levels as its own personnel.

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy which is in place for government social workers needs to be expanded to cover all relevant categories of personnel in both the public service and the NPO sector. The human resources crisis must be addressed holistically, and not by moving the existing limited pool of personnel around to fill holes in the system by

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Marie-Louise Samuels, Department of Education, January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Marie-Louise Samuels, Department of Education, January 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Estimation by Eric Atmore. Centre for Early Childhood Development, January 2008.

creating new gaps as is happening at present. This is a particular danger in the social service sector, where roles are inclined to overlap.

The ongoing uncertainty about the position of categories other than social workers needs to be resolved. Clarification on the status of and regulation of these categories must be sped up otherwise crucial groups such as CYCWs and ECD workers will continue to be marginalised in planning and budgeting, leaving them unable to implement the tasks allocated to them in the Children's Act.

It is urgent to reverse the siphoning off of the scarce supply of social workers into what is in effect an extension of the social security system for the placement of children into foster care. This is a threat to the proper functioning of the children's social services system as a whole and particularly to organisations and departments responsible for protecting children from abuse. The situation can be turned around through a radical shift in the direction of a truly developmental approach.

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This essay was primarily informed by:

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