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## **Balancing Work and Life Responsibilities**

Parliament of South Australia  
House of Assembly  
Select Committee Inquiry

Presented by the YWCA of Adelaide

June 2007

22 June 2007

David Pegram  
Secretary  
House of Assembly Select Committee  
Parliament of South Australia

Via email: [david.peggram@parliament.sa.gov.au](mailto:david.peggram@parliament.sa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Pegram,

The YWCA of Adelaide is pleased to present this submission to the Select Committee Inquiry *Balancing Work and Life Responsibilities*.

Our organisation commends the South Australian Parliament for its investigation into how to achieve a work-life balance for our community.

The YWCA of Adelaide is a not for profit organisation that influences government and community attitudes on issues facing young women, empowers young women through leadership development and supports young women in need.

In this submission, the YWCA of Adelaide responds to the Terms of Reference, discussing issues and solutions around balancing work and life responsibilities.

Of primary interest to the YWCA of Adelaide is the need for women to effectively juggle the demands of work, life and family. We are concerned about the potential for young women to balance life and work particularly at the beginning of their career. Young women who are active and engaged in a variety of pursuits such as arts practice, a music career, professional sport, volunteer and community work as well as paid employment contribute significantly to a healthy society, yet they continue to struggle to reach a balance among all of these life factors. While much energy is focused on finding ways to achieve a balance between work and family, the YWCA of Adelaide encourages Parliament to be mindful of the needs of young women's participation in work, community and society, and to encourage the application of flexible workplace models to meet the needs of young workers. The strategies discussed in this submission apply equally to women who want to become or are mothers, and those women who aren't.

For many women who have or plan for children, reaching a work-life balance has been a long term struggle. The YWCA of Adelaide has worked with women throughout this spectrum as clients of our services, volunteers, staff and members. Having worked with women in South Australia for over 125 years, we are well placed not only to comment on the experiences of women, but also offer practical solutions that lead to positive changes for all people in South Australia.

It is timely in this introduction to refer to recent research of the Two Degrees of Separation Project. This joint initiative between the YWCA of Adelaide and a group of young women consulted 100 young women aged 16-25 in 2006 and 78 young women aged 16-30 in

early 2007. One of the major findings to come out of the forums, consultations and surveys was concern about Work/Life Balance:

There was a strong sense of frustration expressed by young women as they discussed their current and future work-life experiences. Most young women were concerned that they would not be able to achieve a "balance" without significant sacrifice. The workshop participants expressed strong agreement that all employers and organisations have a responsibility to support women's participation (in the workforce) through flexible work arrangements and funded maternity and paternity leave. However, young women also felt that they had an individual responsibility to challenge gender stereotypes and demand greater family and community support in achieving a work-life balance.

Staff employed at the YWCA of Adelaide enjoy workplace policies promoting work-life balance which include but are not limited to: flexible work hours, the ability to work from home (as suitable), study leave, professional development and training opportunities. The organisation is committed to ensuring and promoting staff's health and well being as documented in the Policies and Procedures Manual section 'Minimisation of stress and prevention of 'burn out''. Furthermore, staff are currently negotiating a new Collective Agreement which may include conditions such as paid parental leave.

The YWCA of Adelaide recognises that outcomes of this Inquiry will contribute to fulfilling one of the 2007 additions to the State Strategic Plan: **T2.12 Work-life balance (new):** *improve the quality of life of all South Australians through maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.*

We look forward to following the progress of the Inquiry and its outcomes and welcome legal and societal changes that will improve the health and wellbeing of all South Australians.

If you would like to consult with the staff of the YWCA of Adelaide throughout the Inquiry, please contact Chief Executive Gail Jackson on 8227 0155.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gail Jackson', written in a cursive style.

Gail Jackson  
**Chief Executive**

In 2006, 77% of surveyed Australians agreed with the statement:

“A government’s prime objective should be achieving the  
greatest happiness of the people,  
not the greatest wealth.”

*Hamilton & Rush (2006)  
The attitudes of Australians to happiness and social well-being, The Australia Institute.*

## **(a) Identify best practice employment standards, which enable public and private sector workers to balance work and life responsibilities, including the care of dependants**

Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

*The Work Foundation, a UK not-for-profit organisation*

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that best practice employment standards include:

1. flexible work environments which include a 'life course' approach;
2. encouraging reasonable working hours by changing the cultural expectations around long working hours;
3. paid parental leave;
4. provision of on site child care; and
5. encouraging men to play a greater role as parents.

### **1. Flexible Work Environments including a 'Life Course' approach**

The YWCA of Adelaide advocates that flexible work environments offer flexibility of hours worked throughout the course of a day and week and provides for working from home as suitable. Flexible work environments also accept and encourage job share and part time work, which can be particularly important for women returning to work after the birth/adoption of a child.

We believe that a 'Life Course' approach to work-life balance is a best practice employment standard. A Life Course approach recognises that needs change over time, and therefore tailors work responsibilities to reflect demands outside of work. As families are diverse, a 'one size fits all' model of flexible work arrangements is not appropriate. A range of workplace options throughout the lifecycle is required.

To be effective and fair, flexible work arrangements must be available to all employees – those with and without children, and must benefit both the employer and employee and be responsive to the needs of both the employer and employee.

### **2. Encouraging reasonable working hours by changing the cultural expectations around long working hours**

Australia is the second longest working time country in the developed world, and has the largest proportion of employees working long hours in the OECD. Long working hours reduce family and rest time, cause greater stress on individuals and families, represent a lack of leisure time and are a threat to public health.

A comparison of work-life conflict between Britain, France, Finland, Norway and Portugal, taken from the 2002 Family module International Social Survey Programme, shows that in all five countries, working hours were the most significant predictor of work-life conflict. Finland, where the reported hours of work are shortest out of the five countries, showed significantly lower levels of work-life conflict.

In March 2007, an Australian report *An Unexpected Tragedy, Evidence for the connection between working patterns and family breakdown in Australia* was released by the not-for-profit interest group 'Relationships Forum'. It explains how 30 years ago, Australians generally worked less than 40 hours a week, in steady employment, in typical work hours between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday. But today, the Report says that working patterns have changed to such an extent that Australia is now the only high-income country in the world that combines:

- average working hours that are at the top end amongst high-income nations
- a strong tendency for work on weeknights and weekends, and
- a relatively large proportion of the working population employed on a casual basis.

"An emerging body of international research shows that these long and atypical working patterns are associated with dysfunctional family environments, including:

a) Negative health outcomes for those working these times, particularly if they are parents

b) Strained family relationships

c) Parenting marked by anger, inconsistency and ineffectiveness.

And, critically, both long/atypical hours and dysfunctional family environments are associated with:

d) Reduced child wellbeing."

*2007 Relationships Forum report, An Unexpected Tragedy*

In Australia today 27 per cent of workers are employed on a temporary rather than permanent basis. This is one of the highest proportions among OECD countries. Many casual employees work on weekends. The nature of the majority of casual work means that employees do not receive entitlements such as sick or annual leave, and work shifts that often change from week to week. When employees work by rosters that are not predictable or often change at short notice, they have limited capacity for planning social or family arrangements.

Working Hours statistics released by the ABS on 30 May 2007 show:

- 60% of employees in Australia do not have any say in their start or finish times
- 37% usually worked overtime
- 48% of those usually working overtime, usually worked unpaid extra hours only
- 23% had earnings which varied from one pay period to the next, and
- 36% had hours that varied weekly or were required to be on call or standby.

The statistics also reveal that more women than men are working multiple jobs – 58 per cent of employees who work more than one job are women.

The YWCA of Adelaide advocates that best practice employment standards include increasing full time and part time positions and changing the nature of casual roles. We believe that for casual positions, an increase in the predictability of hours worked and having set rosters with prior warning of changes would improve the potential for achieving a work-life balance for casual employees. The YWCA of Adelaide also believes strongly that a change in employer attitudes towards casual staff would improve workplace conditions for casual staff, so that, for example, requesting some unpaid leave does not threaten the security of the job. Our organization believes that government and employers need to lead societal change around the cultural norms and expectations associated with long working hours.

### 3. Paid Parental Leave

In Australia, under Federal and State laws, most parents are entitled to a total of 52 weeks *unpaid* parental leave on a shared basis to care for their newborn or newly adopted child. Paid maternity leave is only available to less than one third of Australian women workers, either as Commonwealth or State employees, or through arrangements with private sector employers.

More than 120 countries around the world provide paid maternity leave through either the social security system, employer or insurance funded schemes. New Zealand, Japan and Canada provide government funded paid maternity leave.

Finland's Ministry of Labour website announces:

*Did you know that the parents – both father and mother – can take family leave? Our current legislation provides for more flexibility in the way gainfully employed parents can share family leave. When both parents take such leave while their children are small, both the father's and the mother's relationship with the child becomes closer – and that has a wide-ranging effect. Do not let the opportunity pass: take leave while your children are small.*

Paid parental leave allows parents to spend time with their children at the time of birth or adoption, and in their early development.

Paid parental leave is a significant step towards allowing women, who choose to, breastfeed their baby. The World Health Organisation recommends that children are breast-fed exclusively for the first six months of life "to achieve optimal growth, development and health", and that thereafter infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond. According to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care's report 'Balancing Breastfeeding and Work', studies have shown that returning to work is a major reason for early weaning.

The 2007 Relationships Forum report, *An Unexpected Tragedy* says that in Australia, the proportion of working couples with children has risen from 42 per cent in 1981 to 60 per cent in 2005, largely due to the significant increase in the number of women at work. Many parents who would like to stay at home to care for their children have little choice but to return to work due to financial pressures. These include HECS debts, the high cost of housing and the rising cost of living. Paid parental leave – for mothers and fathers – would enable families to share leave entitlements and share the responsibilities of parenting. It would reduce the financial strain of living from one income.

Paid parental leave is a strong signifier which places value on parenting and value on being at home to care for children.

Scandinavian countries lead the world in relation to paid parental leave. In Sweden, either parent is entitled to 450 days in total of paid leave – 360 days at 75 per cent of their wage, and 90 days at a flat rate.

ANZ in Australia offers all full-time and part-time employees 12 weeks paid parental leave to primary caregivers. As a result, turnover rates have decreased and the percentage of female employees returning from parental leave increases annually, currently standing at 89.9%. [www.eowa.gov.au/EOWA\\_Employer\\_Of\\_Choice\\_For\\_Women](http://www.eowa.gov.au/EOWA_Employer_Of_Choice_For_Women), accessed 1 June 2007

In New Zealand, government-funded paid parental leave was introduced in 2002 and in 2006 eligibility was extended to self-employed parents. Labour Minister Ruth Dyson says that paid parental leave is available to nearly 90 per cent of all women in paid work and that it is being taken up by more than 80 per cent of women. Ms Dyson says: *"New parents agree that accessing paid parental leave lessens money worries around the time of their child's birth or adoption... In today's labour market environment, where over 60 per cent of women participate in paid work, paid parental leave provides essential support for new parents. We are also seeing more flexibility around working arrangements, rather than the traditional 'nine to five', particularly for mothers returning to work after the birth of a child."*

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women states: *'Parties shall take all appropriate measures... to introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment seniority or social allowances.'*

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that best practice employment standards include the provision of paid parental leave for mothers and fathers, with the provision of returning to their previously held position on a part time, time share or full time basis up to two years after the birth or adoption of the child.

#### **4. Provision of Child Care**

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that best practice employment standards include the provision of on-site child care facilities. The YWCA of Adelaide understands that this is not always achievable, but maintains that it is a best practice standard. The YWCA of Adelaide also advocates for an increase in government and community child care facilities, increasing the number of available child care places.

#### **5. Encouraging Men to Play a Greater Role as Parents**

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that best practice employment standards include the changing of gender role perceptions that women must be the primary care givers for children. This can be achieved through increasing paid paternity leave entitlements, encouraging men to access parental leave, valuing father's roles in society and reducing the expectations of working hours for men.

In summary to section a) of this submission, the YWCA of Adelaide supports the following statement from the Premier's Council for Women, 2005 Response to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Discussion Paper: *Striking the Balance Women, Men, Work and Family*:

*Striking the balance in the work/family/life debate is also about recognizing that well balanced individuals contribute positively to building well functioning communities and to raising children. In this context, investment in achieving work-life balance has immeasurable social benefits for now, but is also a form of investment in the future.*

## **(b) To identify economic development opportunities for South Australia as a result of flexible employment practices**

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that economic development opportunities for South Australia as a result of flexible employment practices include:

1. increasing the fertility rate;
2. recruiting and retaining staff, reducing stress and increasing productivity.

### **1. Increasing the fertility rate**

Women are delaying having children or not having them at all due to a variety of reasons which include loss of income, interruptions to career progression, reduced income upon returning to work, the difficulty of the 'sandwich' effect between young children and ageing parents, the high cost of child care and limited child care places available, social isolation for mothers, and the devaluing of parenting.

The YWCA of Adelaide recognises that economic pressures in South Australia today include an ageing population, a skills shortage, and a declining fertility rate. These factors combined will place significant pressure on future generations who will be required to carry the burden of expenditure without the necessary tax base required to achieve it. While we support an increase in net migration, the YWCA of Adelaide believes that increasing the fertility rate will have positive economic benefits for the state.

The YWCA of Adelaide believes an increased fertility rate can be achieved through changes to workplace laws and cultures which promote a work-life balance and support and value families. These include the reforms discussed in section a) such as paid parental leave, changing cultural norms around working hours, and increasing the participation of men in the role of parent.

In South Australia, UniSA is one of the leading institutions in providing paid parental leave. Since introducing 22 weeks paid maternity leave in August 2006, there has been a 75 per cent increase in the number of babies born to staff. In an *Advertiser* article, 4 May 2007, UniSA Human Resources Director Shard Lorenzo says flexible working arrangements and generous provisions – such as a day off a month during pregnancy, a phased-in return to work, and the opportunity to cash in leave loading for extra holiday days – means UniSA can “attract and retain high quality staff”.

Consequently, UniSA was the 2005 Gold Award winner at the ACCI/BCA National Work and Family Awards, and has status as the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace employer of choice for women.

The OECD Report 2004 “Babies and Bosses: Recommendations to Help Families Balance Work and Family Life” says: *Countries with policies that facilitate regular female employment... by offering public support for child care for 0-3 year olds, flexible working hours and individual tax systems, are also countries with the highest fertility rates.*

### **2. Recruiting and retaining staff, reducing stress and increasing productivity**

Flexible workplace practices benefit employers and corporations by providing broader choice of skilled workers, reducing staff absenteeism and staff turnover, greater work

satisfaction and increasing employee loyalty. Flexible workplace practices also improve company profits and productivity.

Worker stress leads to reduced productivity in the workplace and increases pressure on an already stretched mental health and social security system. Stress at work enters the home and impacts on family relationships with an increased risk of family conflict and family breakdown. Strategies to enable work-life balance make both social and economic sense in the long term, for businesses, individuals and communities.

BusinessVictoria states that a good work-life balance puts employees more in control of their working life, reducing stress while increasing productivity and reducing days off. *"It also reduces staff turnover. Recruitment is costly and not just in a financial sense. Staff retention improves morale, staff loyalty and commitment."*

Devon County Council in the UK claims: *"As well as enabling managers to plan ahead more effectively a good work/life balance increases motivation, reduces absenteeism and helps us to recruit and retain staff."*

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations says: *"The cost of recruitment, retraining and loss of investment in staff skills associated with high staff turnover, far outweigh any minimal additional costs associated with some of the work-life policies and practices that many organisations have now successfully introduced."*

**(c) To examine the impact of State and Federal Industrial Relations Systems for South Australians seeking to achieve an appropriate work and life balance**

A Family Responsibilities and Working Women's Lives Discussion Paper from Curtin University states that: "*Australia's performance in terms of employers providing family friendly workplaces is currently below world best practice levels...*" The Paper cites research which compares Australia to the US, Canada, Sweden and Finland in respect to supporting women with child care needs: "*...the government financial assistance available to mothers wishing to enter the labour market in Australia paled in comparison to assistance available in countries with highly progressive family friendly policies such as Finland.*"

The introduction of new work place legislation by the Federal Government, until recently called WorkChoices, has been the subject of several studies, reports and papers. A little over a year since the new legislation was introduced, women are identified as one of the working groups put at most disadvantage by the removal of Awards, the abolition of unfair dismissal processes, the introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and the move from collective to individual bargaining.

Combined comments from a submission to the Australian Fair Pay Commission in 2006 by the Women's Electoral Lobby Australia and National Pay Equity Coalition; the Women in Social and Economic Research at Curtin University submission to the Fair Pay Commission; and the Office for Women's Policy Discussion Paper, *WorkChoices: Impact on Western Australian Women*, reveal that:

- AWAs indicate a widening of the gender gap
- Under registered collective agreements women received 90 per cent of the hourly rate of men on such agreements
- Women on AWAs received only 80 per cent of the hourly pay of men on AWAs
- ABS data shows that women on AWAs have hourly earnings 11 per cent less than women on collective agreements
- There is evidence that shows differential negotiating skills between men and most women mean that women lose out when in individual bargaining

The study *Brave New WorkChoices: What is the Story So Far? 2007* by Griffith University Professor David Peetz shows that under WorkChoices:

- More employees are moving onto AWAs and fewer onto collective agreements, with award coverage declining
- There has been a substantial loss of conditions for many workers signing AWAs
- There has been a loss of conditions in mainly non-union collective agreements
- Minimum wage fixing arrangements have led to a real wage decline for most award-reliant workers

According to Peetz's study there has been a drop in real and relative earnings for women.

In the six months to August 2006, earnings for females in the private sector rose by just 0.5 per cent compared to 1.3 per cent for males. In real terms female earnings fell by 2 per cent, indicating an increasing inequality between men and women.

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that Industrial Relations systems should protect the rights of women at work and reduce the gender equity pay gap. We believe this can be achieved through workplace practices which include but are not limited to:

- Collective bargaining rather than individual contracts
- Set minimum wages and conditions
- An Independent avenue of redress in cases of discrimination or unfair dismissal

The YWCA of Adelaide also advocates that:

- More women are employed in management positions and elected or appointed to Boards
- Women are paid the same as men for equal work

The 2002 OECD report, 'Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands', focused on the balancing of work and family life in the three countries. It outlines broader reasons beyond the workplace, as to why this debate is important to Government:

*The reason why the reconciliation of work and family is increasingly important to so many governments is that it is hoped that getting the right balance will promote all sorts of other goals of society. Increasingly aggregate labour supply and employment (so increasing national income); families with more stable and secure sources of income, families better able to stand the stresses of modern life, and if relationships do break down, better able to move on in their lives, better child development outcomes, less public expenditure, higher fertility (or at least, enabling families to have their desired number of children) and more gender equity, are often primary government objectives.*

## **and to consider any other relevant matter**

The YWCA of Adelaide would like the Committee to consider the following as relevant matter:

1. Teenage Mothers
2. Gender Stereotypes

### **1. Teenage Mothers**

As an advocate for young women, the YWCA of Adelaide would like the Committee to consider the particular social factors that affect teenage mothers. The YWCA of Adelaide supports recommendations made by YWCA Australia to the 2005 Federal Government House of Representatives Inquiry on Balancing Work and Family that include:

- Exploring ways of increasing school retention during and after pregnancy through building a collaborative approach between schools and service providers, and changing school policies to allow pregnant girls to stay at school;
- Ensuring that young mothers have access to enabling infrastructure such as public transport; health services; a secure and liveable income; safe and stable accommodation;
- Affordable and appropriate childcare; and
- Alternate pathways for training and education.

With educational attainment being a leading indicator of workforce attachment and life-time earnings potential, the YWCA of Adelaide considers that these recommendations are of particular importance for South Australia's long term social, cultural and economic outlook.

### **2. Gender Stereotypes**

'It could be said that the household beats the workplace hands down as a site where gender matters and where gender determines what you do. It not only generates family responsibilities, it allocates them unevenly between men and women. Things on the home front haven't shifted much despite women's rising labour force participation rates. Mothers going out and doing paid work is obviously not enough to really shift how unpaid work is distributed at home.' *Beyond Preference and Choice: How Mothers Allocate Time to Work and Family, Dr Morehead, A. 2005 Australian Institute of Family Studies*

Women traditionally were the carers for children and elderly parents, local community participants, and the unpaid workers in the home. Despite an increasing participation in the labour market - in the number of hours worked, the number of years in the workforce, and returning to work after the birth of children – women remain the primary carers for children and elderly parents and the primary worker in the home. HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey) surveys over the last six years continue to show that women spend at least twice as much time as men (in a heterosexual coupled household) on housework, irrespective of whether one or both of them are in full or part time employment or unemployed.

Women also remain the primary carers for family members with a disability. Benefits to the community and the economy for these 'hidden' roles are immense, and equally the detriment to achieving a work-life balance for women in these caring roles is significant and long-term.

*It's About Time: Women, men, work and family* is the final paper of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in to balancing work and life responsibilities in Australia. It was released in 2007 following years of consultations. One of its many powerful statements signals potential economic and social damage that may be caused if changes to striking a work-life balance are not made immediately, and in this example, for women who care for family members with a disability.

*The cost of not finding solutions to this challenge can be immense, particularly for individuals who are forced to take poorer quality paid work in order to meet their dual responsibilities or who have to drop out of the labour market altogether. There are also costs for employers, particularly in industries with skills shortages, and costs for the economy as a whole in terms of workforce participation and productivity.*

The YWCA of Adelaide believes that government needs to be at the forefront of role modeling good behaviour, adopting policies and practices, and funding education campaigns and strategies that debunk stereotypes about and create meaningful changes in male and female roles within the family and the home.