



# Insecure Work Inquiry

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**Submission by Unions NSW Women's Committee  
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## **Introduction**

1. Unions NSW and the Unions NSW Women's Committee welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Insecure Work Inquiry.
2. Unions NSW is the peak body for trade unions and union members in NSW. It has over 75 affiliated unions and trades and labour councils representing approximately 550 000 workers across NSW.
3. In NSW there are over 260 000 women union members, making up 47.5% of all union members in the state.
4. Our union affiliates cover the spectrum of the workforce, stretching from workers in finance to footwear and construction to communications. Unions NSW is the largest member based organisation for workers in NSW.
5. The Unions NSW Women's Committee is a working committee comprised of female union representatives from Unions NSW affiliates. The committee meets monthly to discuss issues that face women in the workplace and to develop actions and campaigns to address these.
6. In preparing this submission, Unions NSW consulted with our affiliated unions, held "Secure work" roundtables in Sydney and the Central Coast and received over 30 emails from women sharing their experiences of insecure work in relation to themselves or their families. These experiences of insecure work have been referred to throughout the submission and a de-identified summary of these stories are also attached.
7. The Unions NSW Women's Committee submission supports the content and solutions offered by the Unions NSW submission to the Secure Work Inquiry. This submission will echo these arguments, whilst also focussing on the unique problems faced by women when employed insecurely.

## **Women and Insecure Work**

8. The Unions NSW submission identifies the negative impacts that insecure work has on workers in NSW. The Women's Committee submission supports these concerns.
9. In NSW, women make up about 45% of the population who are engaged in work (ABS 2011). From this, almost a quarter (24%) of female employees are engaged in insecure employment, compared to about 17% of men.
10. In this submission, the Unions NSW Women's Committee has focussed on insecure work in relation to: casual work, labour hire and fixed term contracting.
11. Concerns around insecure work are centred around the lack of employment rights and entitlements afforded to insecure employees, namely:
  - 11.1. Reduced unfair dismissal rights;
  - 11.2. Lack of predictable hours and incomes;
  - 11.3. Needing to be constantly available for work which impacts on work/life balance;
  - 11.4. No paid leave, causing casuals to work when sick, never taking breaks, or not being able to care for children or other family members;
  - 11.5. Limited representation rights;
  - 11.6. Limited access to skills and career development;
  - 11.7. Diminished occupational health and safety;
  - 11.8. Low morale;
  - 11.9. Low pay;
12. There is a large proportion of women in NSW and Australia who are engaged in insecure work, insecure work is also more prevalent amongst women than their male counterparts.

13. It is important for the inquiry to consider the interaction between insecure employment and gender. How does gender affect whether or not an employee is able to find secure work and how does insecure work affect women?
14. This submission will look at reasons for and problems associated with women's over representation in insecure work. The submission however will focus on the negative effects that insecure work has on women's lives, particularly their caring responsibilities, and how these problems can be addressed.
15. The Women's Committee acknowledges the significant proportion of women engaged in the workforce as well as the significant number of these women who are in a primary carer's role. The role that women play as primary carers and its relationship with insecure work is a key focus of the Women's Committee's submission. Whilst we acknowledge that recent times have seen a shift towards shared caring responsibilities between parents, the truth remains that women continue to perform a significantly higher proportion of caring and household responsibilities within the family unit.

### **The over representation of women in insecure forms of work**

16. Women are over-represented in insecure work, particularly casual and short term contract work.
17. Two contributing factors to this are:
  - 17.1. The concentration of insecure forms of employment in female dominated industries – particularly the service industry;
  - 17.2. Women engaging in insecure forms of employment in an (often unsuccessful) quest to gain flexibility around their work arrangements
18. Research has found that women often seek casual employment as a way to balance work commitments and caring responsibilities. It has been argued that casual work provides increased flexibility around working hours which is important for women with caring responsibilities in order to allow for time off in school holidays, or caring commitments. Despite this argument, it is more often

the case that the 'flexibility' that is provided by casual work, is flexibility for the employer, and provides little control over working hours for the casual employee. Research has found that casual employment has no real positive effects on primary carers' ability to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

19. Women are also over-represented in part-time work, in response to balancing their caring responsibilities with paid work. Whilst part-time work offers access to paid leave, many women find it difficult to secure permanent part-time work, instead working on short-term contracts. Research has shown that part-time work does have positive effects on an employee's ability to balance their caring responsibilities with work. However, short term contracts also have significant negative effects on employees and their families.

### **The effects of casual employment on women**

20. Not only does women's engagement in casual employment not provide for their greater needs of flexibility, it also greatly reduces their workplace conditions and interferes with their lives and their family's lives in a number of ways.
21. The unpredictable nature of casual work means that in most cases casual employees are given very little notice of when they will be working. Notification of shifts can be anywhere between a few days to an hour (Story 7, 8). This makes arrangements for child care at the last minute extremely difficult, whilst also potentially eating into personal time and commitments.
22. The issue of child care becomes a greater issue for casual employees who work outside of the traditional 9-5 hours. The lack of appropriate child care facilities that are open 'after-hours', creates a significant problem for casual employees who need to seek child care at the last minute due to unpredictable work commitments. With the rise on non-traditional working hours, it is important not just for casual workers, but all workers and carers in Australia to have equal access to formal child care facilities.
23. Casual employees often find it difficult to turn down shifts that they are offered in fear that it gives the impression they 'aren't reliable' or 'don't want the shifts' and

that they will not be offered shift in the future. This emphasises the one-sided nature of the flexibility that is offered by casual work. Such reluctance to turn down shifts can place significant strain on women who may need to arrange for child care or who may have to cancel personal plans they have made with their 'time off' (Story 7)

24. Casual employment does not provide for any paid leave entitlements. Any leave that a casual employee needs to take is unpaid. Not only is there a financial detriment to taking leave, many casual (as referred to above) want to give the impression that they are 'reliable' as to ensure they continue to receive shifts and are therefore reluctant to take leave. This means that many casual workers do not take holidays, go to work when they are sick, and need to arrange for other people to care for their family members should they fall sick. (Story 1, 9)
25. Casual work is often argued to be attractive to mothers and women, as it allows for flexible work practices that accommodate caring responsibilities. There is no evidence to prove this is the case. However, even if such flexibility can be achieved, employees should not have to pay the cost of reduced work entitlements and rights in return for flexibility to allow for their caring and personal responsibilities

### **The effects of short-term contracts on women**

26. Although short term contracts offer access to paid leave, they do not offer any security of employment.
27. The lack of security offered by short-term contracts creates problems around the taking of leave, particularly carers leave. The need to take carers leave is often not foreseeable or avoidable. Employees on short term contracts have expressed that they are often nervous to take this leave, in fear that it will reflect badly and will be a disincentive to have their contract renewed. Short term contracts create an environment where taking leave is something that is feared. (Story 7, 12, 13)
28. The uncertainty of short-term contracts creates concern for employees over financial security, leading them to limit any financial commitments, with many

short-term employees feeling uncomfortable owning a mobile phone in fear they will not be able to afford their phone bill. (Story 13)

29. Some contract employees find that their contract's do not cover certain sections of the year when they are not required, effectively turning them into 'seasonal workers'. Whilst the nature of their employment may entitle these employees to paid leave, in some cases this leave is not enough to cover long non-work periods (for example: school holidays). Thus leaving these employees without an income over significant periods of time. (Story 18)

### **The broader effects of all insecure work**

#### 30. Paid parental leave

- 30.1. The Women's Committee proudly acknowledges the paid parental scheme that has been operational in Australia since January 1, last year. The union movement and Women's Committee welcomed the universal nature of the scheme that provided access to paid parental leave to permanent, casual and labour hire employees.
- 30.2. However, the current 'parental leave work test' has the potential to make short-term contract and seasonal employees ineligible for paid parental leave. The 'work test' requires that the primary carer of the new child worked for at least 330 hours in the 10 month period before the birth with no more than an eight week gap between two consecutive working days. Such requirements mean that time taken off between the renewal of a short term contract may mean that an employee cannot meet these requirements.
- 30.3. For example: an educator employed on short-term contracts who is not required over non-teaching periods, may have their contract expire and renewed at the other side of the teaching break. Such an arrangement could leave the educator ineligible for paid parental leave. (Story 18)

- 30.4. Unions NSW submits that the 'parental leave work test' be expanded to allow for people working on short-term contracts and in seasonal employment to still be eligible to access paid parental leave

### 31. Reduced retirement savings

- 31.1. At present, the retirement savings of women are significantly lower than those of men. This is proving, and will continue to prove to be a significant problem for women in retirement, with many women not being able to support themselves in retirement and spending their final years living in poverty.
- 31.2. There are a number of reasons for the discrepancies in retirement savings between men and women. The breaks in employment that many women have when they have children significantly affects their superannuation, as does the fact that there is a 17% gender pay gap in Australia that favours men.
- 31.3. The lower retirement savings of women can also be contributed to the current superannuation guarantee threshold, which only entitles employees to employer superannuation contributions if they earn over \$450 a month. This threshold disadvantages low earning employees, many of whom are women and employed casually (Story 21)
- 31.4. The Women's Committee submits that the \$450 superannuation threshold be removed and all employees be entitled to receive employer superannuation contributions for the hours they work.
- 31.5. The Women's Committee supports the increasing of the superannuation guarantee to 12%

## **Solutions**

### 32. Strengthening the right to request



- 32.1. The Unions NSW Women's Committee does not support the claim that casual work provides flexibility for women employees who have caring responsibilities.
- 32.2. Casual work should not be the only means by which a woman with caring responsibilities can access work that is able to accommodate her caring responsibilities
- 32.3. The Women's Committee acknowledges the inclusion of the right to request flexible working arrangements in the Ten National Employment Standards. This right allows for parents or carers of children under school age or of a child under 18 with a disability to request a change in working arrangements to assist with the child's care.
- 32.4. The right to request applies to both permanent and casual employees, however the request can only be made after 12 months of service. In order for a casual to make a request they must be a long term casual and have an expectation of ongoing work
- 32.5. The Unions NSW Women's Committee submits that this entitlement should be expanded to all casual employees. Casual employees tend to have little control over the hours and times that they work, access to a right to request would assist casual employees in gaining control over the hours they work and allow for greater cohesion between their caring and working responsibilities
- 32.6. An employee must make their request for flexible working hours in writing and their employer must respond within 28 days. If the employer rejects the request for flexible working arrangements, they are not required to offer any justification for their refusal
- 32.7. The Unions NSW Women's Committee submits that the right to request flexible working arrangements should be strengthened. Employees should have increased rights to move between different forms of employment or change their working hours. This could be modelled on the Netherlands

legislation that gives employees (in workplaces of more than 10 employees) the right to reduce or increase their working hours, with employers able to deny employee requests for such changes only on the grounds of specific conflicting business interests. Such a system needs to protect employees against employer demands for undertaking undesirable variation and also enhance worker choices for more variation to suit their needs.

- 32.8. The strengthening of the right to request flexible working hours will provide women with genuinely flexible work arrangements that can accommodate their caring responsibilities, as opposed to the one sided flexibility that is offered by casual work.

### 33. Portable long service

- 33.1. Long service leave is an entitlement received by permanent employees that have been employed by the same employer for a qualifying period. It is a reward for continuity of service and it is meant to provide a respite from continuous employment.
- 33.2. Today, the Australian workforce is less likely to remain in the same employment, occupation or industry for a long enough period of time to accrue long service leave.
- 33.3. Currently a number of non-standard workers are being afforded various arrangements.
- 33.4. Under these schemes all workers – irrespective of whether they are employees or contractors, permanents or casual – accrue long service entitlements on the basis of the hours worked in the industry. In the construction industry a levy is paid by the head contractor developer of a site into a trust fund managed by a tripartite board. The schemes have statutory underpinnings and are audited by State governments. On completion of 10 years' service, construction workers can take their long service leave, even though they may have worked for a variety of

employers, in a variety of different roles, on a variety of sites. This is referred to as a portable long service leave scheme

33.5. The Unions NSW Women's Committee submits that a portable long service scheme should be introduced for all workers.

33.6. Such a scheme would:

33.6.1. Remove discrimination against those in less secure forms of employment;

33.6.2. Create less bias against women workers who are more heavily represented in small business and who have a higher level of labour mobility in order to progress;

33.6.3. Acknowledge continued engagement in the paid workforce, and provide long term workers with respite from paid employment.

33.7. A portable long service leave scheme would minimise the effects that casual and short term-employment has on women workers, providing the opportunity for a form of paid leave and respite from the workplace that they would not otherwise have access to.

34. As referred to in the Unions NSW submission, the Unions NSW Women's Committee also supports the implementation of:

34.1. Restrictions on the use of casuals and casual conversion clauses

34.2. Restrictions on the use of fixed term contracts

34.3. Restrictions on the use of labour hire

## **Conclusion**

35. The Unions NSW Women's Committee submission outlines the significant effects that insecure work has on employees and their families, particularly looking at its interruption of work/life balance.

36. This is a theme also evident within the Unions NSW submission. We acknowledged that the affects that insecure work has on work/life balance is an issue faced by both men and women. However, the Women's Committee submission seeks to bring particular attention to the fact that:

36.1. Women make up a significant proportion of the insecure workforce;

36.2. Women tend to have greater household and caring responsibilities that tend to negatively interact with insecure employment

## **Stories of women's experiences of insecure work to Unions NSW**

### **Story 1: 40 year old, working as a casual teacher to overseas students for five years**

I teach English to overseas students. I have been in this position for five years. I have been employed as a casual the whole time although the work has been constant. In my school, all English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) teaching positions are casual.

During the time that my workplace closes over Christmas I will have no income. Of course there is no sick pay or holiday pay so I only take time off for illness if I can't get out of bed and I can't afford to take time off.

If I leave in an effort to get something better in this industry, I will at least at first, be looking at another casual position which may or may not turn out to provide an ongoing income. I earn more than half my family's income so I'm risking a lot to change jobs. I have a disability which really limits my options in regard to finding another job in this or another industry.

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### **Story 2: Teachers' Aide Special, employed at one school since 1999**

I am a Teachers' Aide Special and have been until recently in the one school since 1999. During that time, it was a guessing game whether I work next week, month or year, all depending on funding.

Just over two years ago the school lost one of our major students (one with a significant amount of funding) and I lost my job.

I had to seek work out of the field I had grown to love. After finding another job, I later discovered there was enough funding but another Aide was employed. It is difficult for the students when they have inconsistency with their aides.

This is an occupation that doesn't have too many permanent positions. I believe permanency should be extended to aides who have worked a particular consistent number of years. I would love to have a secure position and to get back into this work again. Students with needs will always be in mainstream schools and aides will always be required but we are treated poorly for such an important role in any school.

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### **Story 3: Part-time worker, missing out on career opportunities**

I feel that my job is insecure because I have had recently 2 children and now work part-time. I used to work full time and since having children I have found discrimination in the workplace in relation to higher duties and job promotions. These positions have gone to males and usually to those with less experience than me.

I am worried I may be targeted for redundancy because I work 3 days per week. My employer says it is committed to providing work/life balance but if you take up these opportunities there are also opportunities to be discriminated against in other areas.

#### **Story 4: Nurse chooses to go casual**

I was working as a permanent nurse in a Sydney public hospital. I would get allocated all sorts of different shifts at all different times of the day. I was really difficult to cope with and I was not happy. I was told as a permanent I could not get a regular shift pattern during the day-time. I therefore quit and went casual. I can pick and choose the shifts I want and I am much happier. I plan to have a family soon and think being a casual will suit me better with children as well.

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#### **Story 5 Part-time TAFE teachers get fewer hours**

My friends are both part-time long-term TAFE NSW teachers who were given fewer hours of work this year. Next year, their hours will be reduced even further.

With only two weeks' notice, one was told to finish his class off early, even before the students had completed their last project which was assessable. The students and teacher were devastated. My teacher friend also lost his expected income, critical when the long vacation weeks are without pay.

These are good, experienced and loyal teachers. They deserve secure employment and holiday pay. With the abrupt move of permanent TAFE teachers to the Fair Work Australia minimum conditions next year, this attitude will spread to the essential core of full-time teachers, who keep the system going. We expect to be exploited by this vulnerability. We demand security of conditions and a change of attitude to valuing education and teachers' role in the overall development of this country.

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#### **Story 6: Casual TAFE teacher and part-time school teacher would love permanency**

My husband is a teacher and is on casual pay for 2 days per week in school term times. He only gets paid for face to face hours and in his contract it says that if they are dissatisfied with his work that he can be dismissed at the end of the working day with that much notice.

I am a full time mum and we have a large family so this is something that I am concerned about.

Another reason that it is a worry is that it means my husband doesn't get a break - his other 3 days of employment are in a school so he should have school holidays and for his health should have at least some break but he can't rest in the holidays at all because he has to work (as a tradesman) to try to cover our budget for those casual days until work starts again in 2012.

TAFE are paying him at a fair rate but even though he gets paid for 8 hours a day face to face work they say that each day covers prep and marking as well as holidays and sickness. This really is incredibly hard to manage.

Being casual too means he is less prepared to raise any issues if he feels there is a problem at work. Once he was only paid half his normal wage but chose not to query it too hard in case he would be sacked. There have been instances when he has felt unwell and attended work when he really should have rested. In doing so he may have risked infecting others. He tries to work through the

casual days when he is sick, and then take a sick day if he is still unwell on one of his permanent part-time days. That way, his pay won't be reduced.

I'd much rather a lower rate per week and continual pay throughout the year rather than a higher rate and then nothing in holiday times (when you tend to need money more - e.g Christmas and other celebrations, holiday breaks, special events). I'd also like to see it be compulsory for people to be made permanent part time after a certain period of satisfactory work at a workplace.

The whole situation causes stress in the whole family as the kids and I would love my husband to be around more in the holidays and I would love not to have to stress about the budget.

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### **Story 7: Secondary teacher, single parent, seeks permanency**

I am a secondary teacher and have been employed for 6 years on only temporary contacts or a casual basis. I have usually had full time work in this capacity. I have worked in primary schools, high schools and special education.

I have said yes to anything that comes my way often out of fear that I would no longer be offered work. In saying yes I have agreed to work more hours than my peers, do more marking than my peers, I have often been out of my depth without adequate support or training. I have missed out on professional development as I am not permanent and have had to fight to be put on contracts when employed full-time as a casual for more than a term.

I am a single parent who has never been able to earn the equivalent of a first year teacher. I have fretted that if I should say no to work I would no longer get work. I feel that they use this anxiety and insecurity to get a pound of flesh out of you that you would never get out of permanent staff who have tenure and security.

Picking up permanent work (in a lot of cases) involves locating to an area where permanent work is available. This is often difficult for women and families with children and caring responsibilities, as they are not able to up-root their lives.

The teaching award has a conversion from casual to short-term contract. This never occurs automatically and I have to chase it up. Many other teachers do not know that this entitlement exists. Once converted to a short-term contract teachers are entitled to sick leave and holiday pay during school holidays. Whether teachers do receive payments on school holidays, is how ever contingent on when they were signed over to the short-term contract. There is also no formalized link between a short term contract and a permanent role. I know a teacher who has been employed casual for 7 years.

I fear if I push too hard for the casual conversion, it will lead them to call someone else.

Short term contracts are also difficult in terms of planning and not knowing if you are going to get re-employed.

I have difficulty in getting loans. I don't believe I will own a house. I get stressed and feel frustrated that I do not have control over my employment. I feel used by my professional peers and I am not surprised that many teachers leave the profession out of sheer frustration. I know I am not unique in

my experience as most of my friends and peers who I work with are not permanent staff.

I struggle financially over holiday periods. I save my tax return cheque for the Christmas holiday period and use it as a form of holiday pay.

There are also significant problems with the interaction between welfare/Centrelink payments and income for casual work. The Family Tax Benefit and child care rebates require an estimation of yearly income. This is very hard for me to determine, and often leads to underpayment or overpayment of Centrelink payments.

My daughter has not had a permanent teacher teach her for four years.

The issue has created tension in workplaces where permanent staff and casual staff aren't entitled to the same. The casuals spend a lot of time complaining about permanent staff.

You don't feel comfortable reporting safety issues in the school – as not to be seen as a trouble maker. Why would the school invite a trouble maker back?

I have difficulty accessing training and development. This is because training and development is generally delivered at the school level, particular in staff development days which only permanent or contract staff are invited to. There is a need for teachers to keep up with training to maintain their accreditation. This is extended from 5 to 7 years for casual teachers, but it doesn't make it any easier to access the appropriate training.

As a casual teacher you receive a call at 6.30am if there is a casual teaching position available for the day. This places stress on getting your child up and ready for school before you can go to work and putting them in before-school care. If a call for work doesn't come until 7.30 or after than I'm not able to accept as this isn't enough time to get my daughter to care and myself ready for work. But there is also the feeling of needing to say yes to shifts in fear that they won't be offered again.

A lot of school principals are already deciding who they employ by not filling permanent positions.

I am a good worker who is keen, enthusiastic and flexible however my resume shows someone who has not been able to hold a secure job. I don't know what the solution is for me. I am considering re-training.

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### **Story 8: 3 year casual employee, mushroom picking**

Until recently I worked casually as a mushroom picker for 3 years. There were approximately forty employees at my company and most complained of the inconsistency of work. Most of the employees were seeking permanent employment but this was not offered to anyone. Some weeks the employees worked six days a week for three hours a day. The following week they might work six days a week and up to seven hours a day for less than \$500 gross salary.

There was never enough money to survive. Planning any personal activities was also not possible because you did not know what shifts you would have. You were always told by the company that they would have work but very rarely knew how long the shifts would be until the day before or on the day.



My biggest concern was the inconsistency in the hours.

While I worked at the company I had no personal life and found it extremely difficult to plan for anything as I never knew how much income I would be receiving that week.

I left the job because of the lack of security to pursue other employment. In my new position in administration, I am employed for 50 hours per fortnight. While I am still employed as a casual, I know what my hours will be and I work four days a week either 9-5 or 9-6. My concern is that I still have no access to entitlements such as sick leave or superannuation but feel that I am now in a better position to ask for those entitlements in the future.

I recently completed a three month trial and while my hourly rate is lower, I earn more money than I did previously in the mushroom picking position.

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### **Story 9: 20 year casuals – living like uni students and approaching middle age**

I work as a manager for a large council.

All my staff are casuals. Some have been casual for 20 years. These staff members do not have mortgages, do not have credit cards, they live in share households like students (they are 40 years old), mostly not married, mostly no kids.

They suffer untold stress and are ridiculously poor as they have limited work. They don't take sick days because they can't pay rent, they don't take time off to care for aging parents because they can't pay rent, they don't take time off to mend a broken heart because they can't pay rent nor do they ever get a proper holiday.

You can only imagine the quality of work I get out of these otherwise capable intelligent workers. They suffer from non-organic mental illness from a sense of feeling worthless. I am the boss and I can see how very very unfair it is to have some people secure and some not, doing the same job.

There is also a plethora of people doing a full time workload in 25 hrs a week in this organisation.

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### **Story 10: Privatisation worries**

I've been with Sydney Ferries for almost many decades. It has been a great place to work.

In the last 15 years, I have witnessed a steady decline of the company.

Now we are being transferred to a new private company, I am still very unsettled about the future.

My thoughts are now in finishing my house in preparation for putting the house on the market.

Sydney Ferries isn't interested in long term employees anymore. They want fresh young blood & all casual. I don't believe I have much of a future left with the Ferries. This has been my main job since leaving school & I am very worried about my future.

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**Story 11: Casual list for 4 years**

My daughter is a trained Teacher and has been on the casual list for the past 4 years. The only positions, other than casual days here and there, that are offered are only temporary and in isolated places. The fact that the position on offer is only temporary and in an isolated situation disadvantages her as she would have to relocate or pay double rent to retain her existing accommodation while doing the temporary work, plus give up other jobs that she may have that help to supplement her irregular income. The longer this continues the more separated she becomes from the profession.

Currently she is in a relationship and they are trying to buy a house but without a regular income it is difficult to get finance.

My daughter has taken on other jobs but finds that this prevents her from accepting the casual teaching jobs that are only available on short notice so it becomes a no win situation - either she gives up the teaching that she loves so that she can earn a regular income or she risks earning no income while she sits at home waiting for a call re casual teaching.

Eventually if she does not obtain enough casual work, she will have to consider other career options on a permanent basis. This appears to be a waste of a trained professional. During her period at university it was promised that there would be work available due to the "Baby Boomers" retiring but this has proven to be false.

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**Story 12: Casual jobs impact on disabled worker**

I am offering a couple of examples of things that have happened to my son.

My son has a disability but he is one of the lucky few who have been able to secure employment albeit casual employment.

In September last year, after going through all the necessary medical and drug tests he was offered a position with a company to work in the mines in WA on a fly in fly out basis. A written offer of employment was sent to him and this was signed and returned and he was given a start date to fly to Karratha.

On this understanding he terminated the position he had been working in on a casual basis for over 15 months so he could start work in Western Australia.

The airline tickets that were supposed to be attached to an email were not actually attached.

After many desperate calls to the company on a Saturday, at a time when the company was closed, he was assured the tickets would be forwarded on the following Monday and that he would just start a couple of days after everyone else.

When the tickets did not arrive again he was told that as he had not made it onto the plane with the crew on the start date his services were no longer required.

He approached his previous employer to see if he could return to work there and although this did eventually happen he was left unemployed for a couple of months until a position became available for him again.

I cannot put into words the impact that this experience had on him but he was so depressed we were concerned for his well being.

I have since heard that this happens to people all the time.

I appreciate that this was a casual position and that on this basis a position can be terminated at any given time. However, one would still think that there should be recourse for people who are given written contracts that such contracts are worth more than the paper that they are written on.

His current situation is that he is working with a Civil Engineering company on a casual basis. He has now worked for this company for the last 5 months approx and this will continue until March/April 2012 when the project they are working on will be finished. At this point in time they have offered him work commencing elsewhere when the current project is finished.

My son loves his job and he loves working for this company. The problem is that when it rains they are not able to work so there have been some weeks where his take home pay is very low and only slightly more than Centrelink benefits. Consequently, it is very hard to get ahead financially.

The idea of being able to save a deposit to buy his own home is something that is therefore simply not feasible while he remains as a casual employee.

I believe that the increased casualisation of the workforce will have an ever increasing impact on the Australian economy as a whole. People working in casual jobs find it very difficult to secure mortgages from banks to purchase their own home as banks do not issue casual mortgages. I purchased my first unit when I was 19 and my first home at age 21 but more and more young people are staying at home with their parents until they are in their late 20s or even early 30s. This must be having an impact on the construction and allied industries and there must be a flow on effect to the whole economy.

Australia needs to look after its young workers better as it is through them that the economy of this country will grow.

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### **Story 13: No permanent employment until her 50s**

I am now in a highly paid, permanent job, but this only happened 11 years ago, when I was 54 years old. Until then I struggled to get permanent employment.

I work for a government department. I have worked there for 15 years but have only had a permanent job for the last 11 years.

Prior to working at the department I worked at a university on research projects. The work was offered on short or long term contracts varying from 3 months to 3 years. Although there were entitlements for paid leave, the non-permanency of the work caused significant financial stress. I never felt confident enough to purchase a mobile phone or to get a credit card. I found this situation highly stressful.

Work at the university was offered on a short term contract basis because it was funded by government grants, and the length and permanency of the work was based purely on the money supplied by these grants – even though I was always working on behalf of the University.

Although there was an entitlement to leave, I always felt nervous about taking any extended sick or personal leave because of the impression that it would give to my employer. I felt that I was constantly on a performance review and that if I was not perceived as reliable, then it would limit my chances of having my contract renewed, or picking up another contract.

I left her work at the University to join the public sector. This resulted in a pay and position cut, however it was appealing to me as there was the prospect of more secure and permanent work.

I am not the only person who has left working in research at universities to join the public sector. The funding model and the way that researchers are engaged on a non-permanent basis has led to the loss of many talented researchers. These researchers, particularly scientists, move to the public sector into more junior jobs that do not necessarily utilise their skills or experience.

The insecurity of research based work in universities threatens the quality of research that is conducted by driving talented researchers out of research in the search for more stable employment.

When I moved to the public sector I was still not offered a permanent position. Instead I was employed on three monthly contracts where I needed to reapply for my job every three months. While there was not the fear of 'lack of funding' that there was at the university, it was stressful for me as I did not have guaranteed ongoing work.

In the public sector I was unable to get permanent work, as there was a staffing freeze, and if I was employed on 'rolling' three monthly contracts I was not considered to be technically employed.

I was a temporary employee in the public sector for 4 years. Again I had access to paid leave, however in many ways temporary workers were treated like 'second class citizens' within the office. Temporary workers were not permitted to apply for jobs that were internally advertised. This was frustrating for me as it gave me no opportunity to pro-actively seek permanent or better employment within the public sector. Within the office there was also tension between permanent and non-permanent staff members with many permanent staff members not seeing them as 'real' employees, and 'turning their noses up' at non-permanent staff.

I felt that my history of 'non-permanent' work also put a black mark against my name when I was applying for other jobs, with prospective employers wanting to know why I was not able to get a permanent job. I believe that my non-permanent work history gave the impression that I was unreliable.

After four years I was able to find permanent work within the public sector, however there are still a number of employees in the public sector who are employed on short term contracts that are continually renewed.

I would describe my experiences of working on short term contracts as living in a 'hand to mouth existence'

I have two children. When I worked at both the university and in the public sector I was their primary carer. This interacted with the insecurity of my work

Because of my caring responsibilities, I sought part-time employment. It was very difficult to find permanent part-time work, with most part-time work being offered was on short term contracts. I believes that I was employed in insecure employment for such a long period of time because I was seeking part-time work.

Insecure employment also interfered with my caring responsibilities by limiting the amount of time I was able to spend caring for my children. One of my children had a severe medical condition which required numerous hospital and specialist visits as well as time off from school. While I had access to leave to care for my child, I felt I was unable to take this leave, as it may have given the impression that I was unreliable, and threaten my chances of having my short-term contract renewed.

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#### **Story 14: Grant funded position not renewed due to “excessive” leave**

I worked part time as a specialist teacher for four years in a non-government school on programs funded each year by grants. I was happy with the arrangement because of family commitments and had a reasonable expectation that I would continue in 2012 as the funding is still available and my skills are needed. However, late in 2011 I was told that I would not be renewed because I had taken "excessive leave" in 2011 to care for an ill child.

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#### **Story 15: Budget cuts cause feelings of insecurity**

I have worked with NSW police (unsworn) since 1986. I love my job and have become institutionalised in regards to my qualifications.

We have had several restructures and always the talk (now more than ever) is to cut public service staff numbers because of budgetary restraints.

I am 50 years old and know that I am not competitive with outsiders if I was to lose my job and have to find another. I cannot afford not to work.

This is a constant worry to me and my co-workers. The feeling of job insecurity never goes away as do the rumours of "what's next" to affect our jobs.

I find this fear (ongoing threat) has a negative effect on morale and the work environment in general.

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#### **Story 16: Nearly 60 and worried about her future**

I am a leading hand in the public sector. I have been told that due to a reform process there will not be any more leading hands.

I am a nearly 60 year old woman. Where will I get a new job?

I am good leading hand. I don't take time off. I am never late. I never leave early.

Soon I will be the only bread winner in my house.

This is real worry.

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### **Story 17: Casual conversion to permanent positions**

My daughter works at a Hospital where many of the employees are casual. My wife has been working at the same hospital for over 2 years as a casual.

Under the Health Award the Health Department is obliged to offer permanent work after employees have worked more than 13 weeks. This is clearly stated in one of the sections of the Award but it isn't happening.

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### **Story 18: Rolling contracts at TAFE**

I have worked at TAFE since January 2008. I was temporarily employed originally for 1 term, 17.5 hours/week. I then gained a 35 hour/week temp job at a different campus, this job was for 12 months. After that, I was put on contracts of 1 term at a time, then a few weeks at a time, always ending before the school holidays. This kept going until June this year, where I was sent to a different location on a casual pay with permanent hours but long travel - each block ending before the holidays started.

It took years to gain a home loan, but now we have one.

I am afraid of the Christmas holidays as they are more than a 2 week break without pay. How will we survive 6 weeks with one low income? I have kept my retail job and work Sundays when I can. I will also be trying to work during the holidays. I need a break too. I have worked very hard to get this job and don't want to lose it.

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### **Story 19: Victimisation of precarious employees**

I would like to make a testimony of issues that I have experienced, and currently am experiencing in the workplace. We have seen a rise in unnecessary victimisation of employees in the workplace, at local Government level.

We recently had a young female university graduate, working for Council, in the capacity of administration worker. The female was also used as a Graphic Designer, outside her job description. She was employed by a local labour hire agency. Our council likes to use as many people as possible from labour hire agencies. This female had been on contract for over two years with Council, performing more duties than she was originally hired for. When a full time position came up in her department, not only did she not get an interview for the position, they got rid of her. The position was given to a female who was friends with management and had less skills than the admin worker. She was victimised when she complained.

The labour hire agency would not discuss the issue with council about her allegations, for fear of not getting any more contracts with Council.

I tried to provide support to the contract worker and as a result I lost some casual shifts I was working.

Another matter with Council is a Supervisor offered a grade 14 position, and was then paid as a grade 11 for the next 4 years. When he raised a grievance, they tried to get rid of him.

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#### **Story 20: Excessive working hours**

For the past 1.5 years I have worked 60 plus hours a week consistently without overtime compensation, low pay rates, been forced to endure hazardous work situations with dangerous OH&S, endured mental, psychological and sexual harassment and abuse, witnessed and was forced to comply with unethical and illegal business practices, witnessed and experienced working conditions violating human rights and that is just the surface problems. I am now on sick leave, not being paid and don't know what my future holds.

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#### **Story 21: Bosses try to avoid paying super**

I was a bus driver for 16 years. I used to be permanent. Now I work 2-3 jobs as a casual to make ends meet. I can't get more hours as employers want to keep hours low so they don't have to pay superannuation. You also tend to lose your job once you hit nine years so the employer doesn't have to pay long service leave. I want to work for another 20 years but I'm worried.

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#### **Story 23: Volunteer, sees workers needing to access support services**

From 2002 to 20010 I volunteered at a Day Centre in regional New South Wales where our primary role was to prepare and serve lunch for the homeless.

During this time I observed an ever growing need for the service, with the numbers of people needing lunch swelling with the increase of people who were unemployed. Then later, I observed another growth in numbers due to the large number of people who were working but could not afford to feed themselves and their families.

What was heartbreaking was the endless stream of people experiencing the cycle of: Unemployment; to no money; to homelessness; to poor health; to poor dental health; to poor mental health; to unemployment; to no money; to homelessness ...

Another issue was the lack of living skills across the Day Centre community. It occurred to me that a simple programme delivering the basic living skills to the people in this community could enable the people who were seeking more secure employment to improve their job hunting skills, enabling them to apply for jobs, prepare for interviews, sit interviews, start a secure job, and keep the job. This would in turn provide the opportunity for the person to restore their physical and mental health. Additionally, in the long term, it would be very cost effective for local, state and federal governments.

Unions NSW Women's Committee – Insecure Work Inquiry

When I was unemployed in 2005 to 2006, I found the non-government agency allocated to me by Centrelink to provide me with a job skills programme was poorly run, ineffective and demoralising. I would not recommend this scheme to anyone who is looking to improve their employment security.

When I retire I am planning to set up a programme in my community to assist people who are seeking a secure job. I only hope there will be secure jobs in the future.

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