



Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc.

COMMUNITY SECTOR WORKFORCE SURVEY 2012



NTCOSS COMMUNITY SECTOR WORKFORCE SURVEY 2012

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc. (NTCOSS) is a peak body for the Social and Community Sector in the NT and an advocate for social justice on behalf of people and communities in the NT, who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service presents the findings of the NT Community Sector Workforce Survey 2012. This survey was conducted throughout October and November 2011. A total of 172 people responded to the survey, with 159 completing it in full, responding to issues relating to individual staff in the sector and management issues facing the sector.

The NTCOSS community sector workforce survey was last conducted in 2007. The survey collects data about the non government, non-profit, community services sector, known throughout this survey as the Community Services Sector. The sector is the major provider of community services, which are particularly important to low income and disadvantaged Territorians.

The survey was distributed to member organisations across the Territory. Organisations were asked to encourage staff to participate and forward the survey to other organisations that fitted the criteria.

The survey was divided into two sections after some general introductory questions answered by all. Respondents self selected which section of the survey to answer, the majority selecting the direct service worker section. For the purpose of the survey analysis we have used the term Manager and Direct Service Worker. Managers included Executive Officers, Directors and Board Members who responded and completed the survey; Direct Service workers included policy workers, advocates and program managers. In total 60 Managers completed the survey and 99 direct service workers. The response rate to the survey was 39 % which is a statistically valid rate. This illustrates that roughly 40% of people who received the survey responded.

A challenge for community service sector organisations is the capacity to meet the demand for service, while juggling funding and resourcing constraints. Monitoring shifts in client need is vital to understand trends of service use and changing demands. This survey did not set out to measure patterns of service use, demand or the number of individual services provided by organisations in different categories. Anecdotally demand exceeds the capacity of organisations; this is confirmed by the 2012 ACOSS, Australian Community Sector Survey. Services were not asked about client numbers and profiles or turn away rates. The aim of the survey was to understand in some small way a little more about people working in the sector in the Northern Territory.

1 Service Characteristics

This section characterises the respondent organisations according to the type of services delivered, the size of the organisation and location.

Geographical area of work setting

No specific standard or schema such as the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) was used to ask this question. Respondents self selected the location after being asked what type of setting they worked in (Figure 1.1). All respondents answered the question. Compare with Figure 1.2 – which describes the shire in which respondent’s work, an even spread across the Territory.

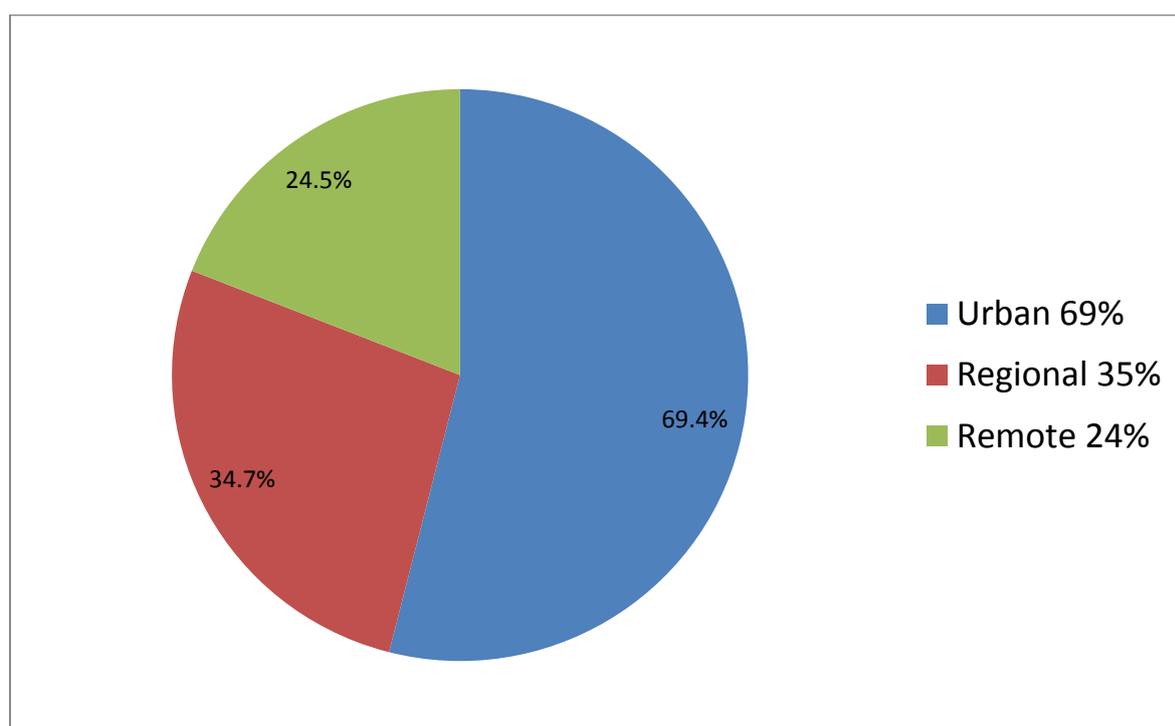


Figure 1.1 Geographical area of work setting

Council/Shire Areas in which respondents work

The distribution of respondents from Council/Shire areas corresponds closely to total populations in the areas.

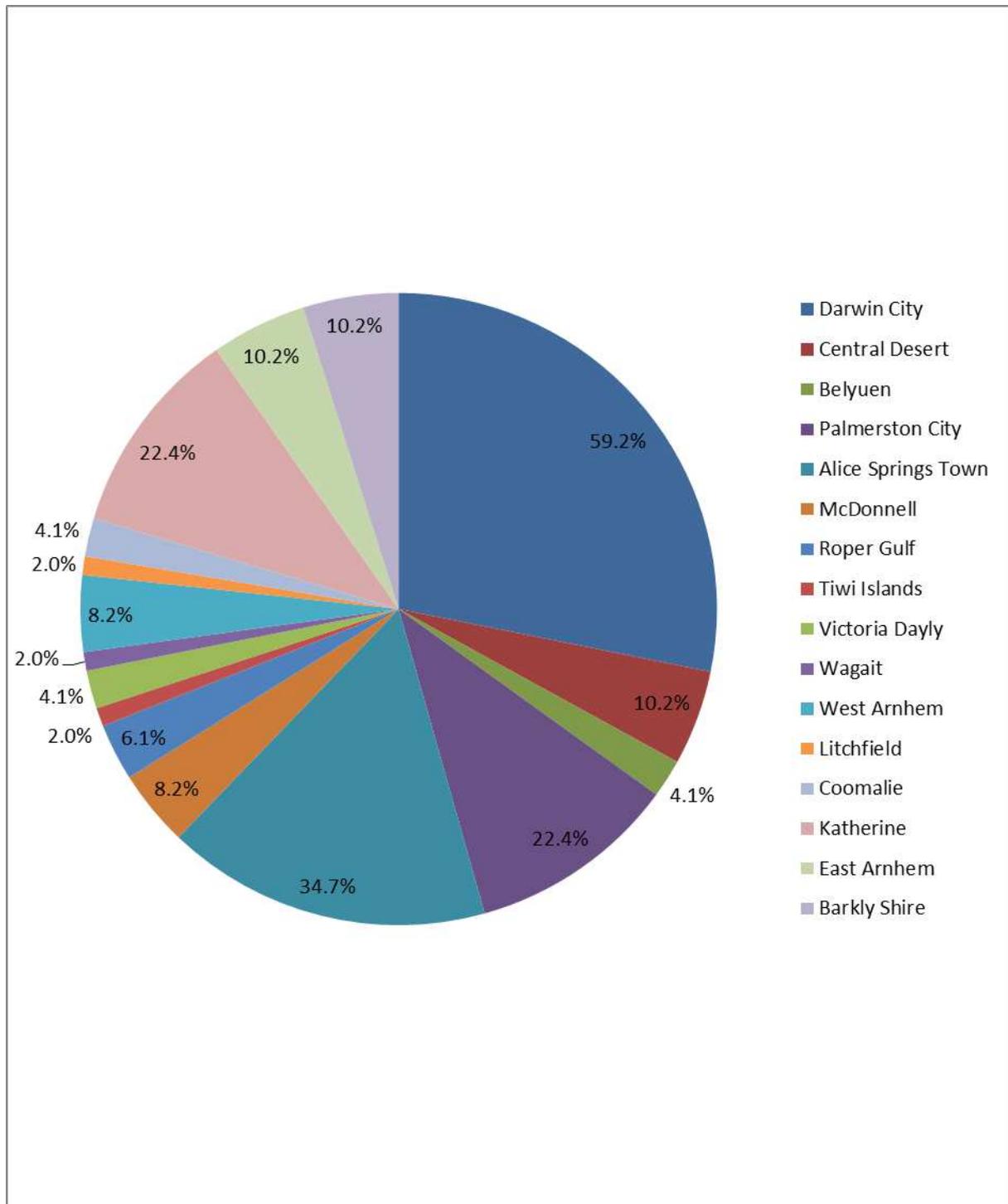


Figure 1.2 Council/Shire Areas in which respondents work

Number of work sites in the NT and Organisational Reach

Respondents were asked if the organisation they worked for had more than one site in the Northern Territory. The majority of organisations had more than one work site in the Northern Territory (see Figure 1.3). The larger Community Service Organisations established and working in the Northern Territory are Australia wide and some are International agencies as seen in Figure 1.4.

The majority of staff from organisations that responded to the survey work across the whole of the Northern Territory.

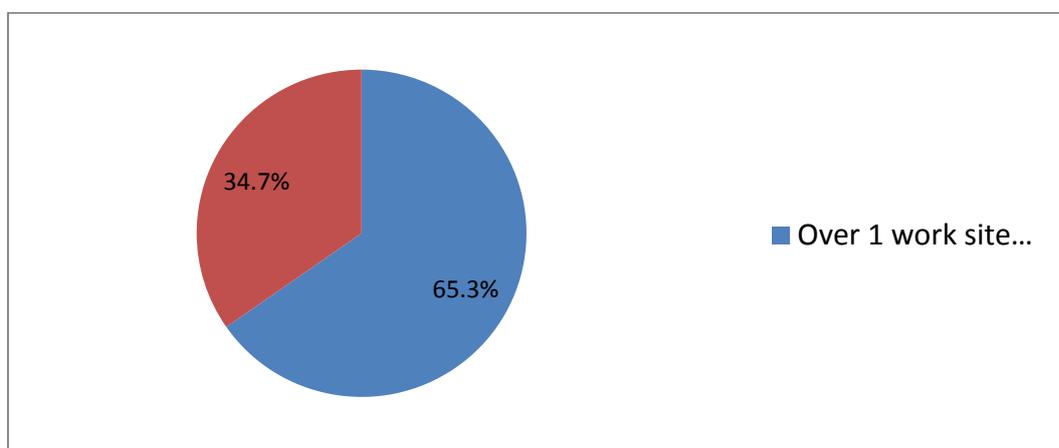


Figure 1.3 Number of work sites in the NT

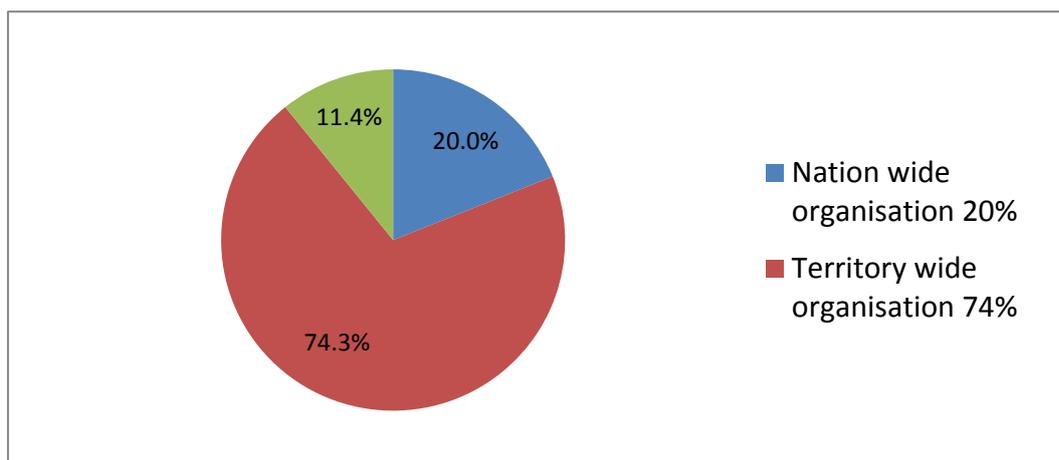


Figure 1.4 Organisational Reach

Organisations according to primary area of service provision

Organisations were asked to specify their primary area of service delivery as shown in Figure 1.5. However many organisations deliver a breadth of services and respondents indicated that it was hard to nominate a single service category. Given the nature of the NT many organisations respond to many and varied needs across different sectors. The array of 'Other' responses tried to capture this and included multi service organisations, specific Domestic Violence services, Community Health and Social Enterprises such as Opportunity Shops. The areas of service provision listed are solely representative of responses to this survey, not of service provision across the Territory.

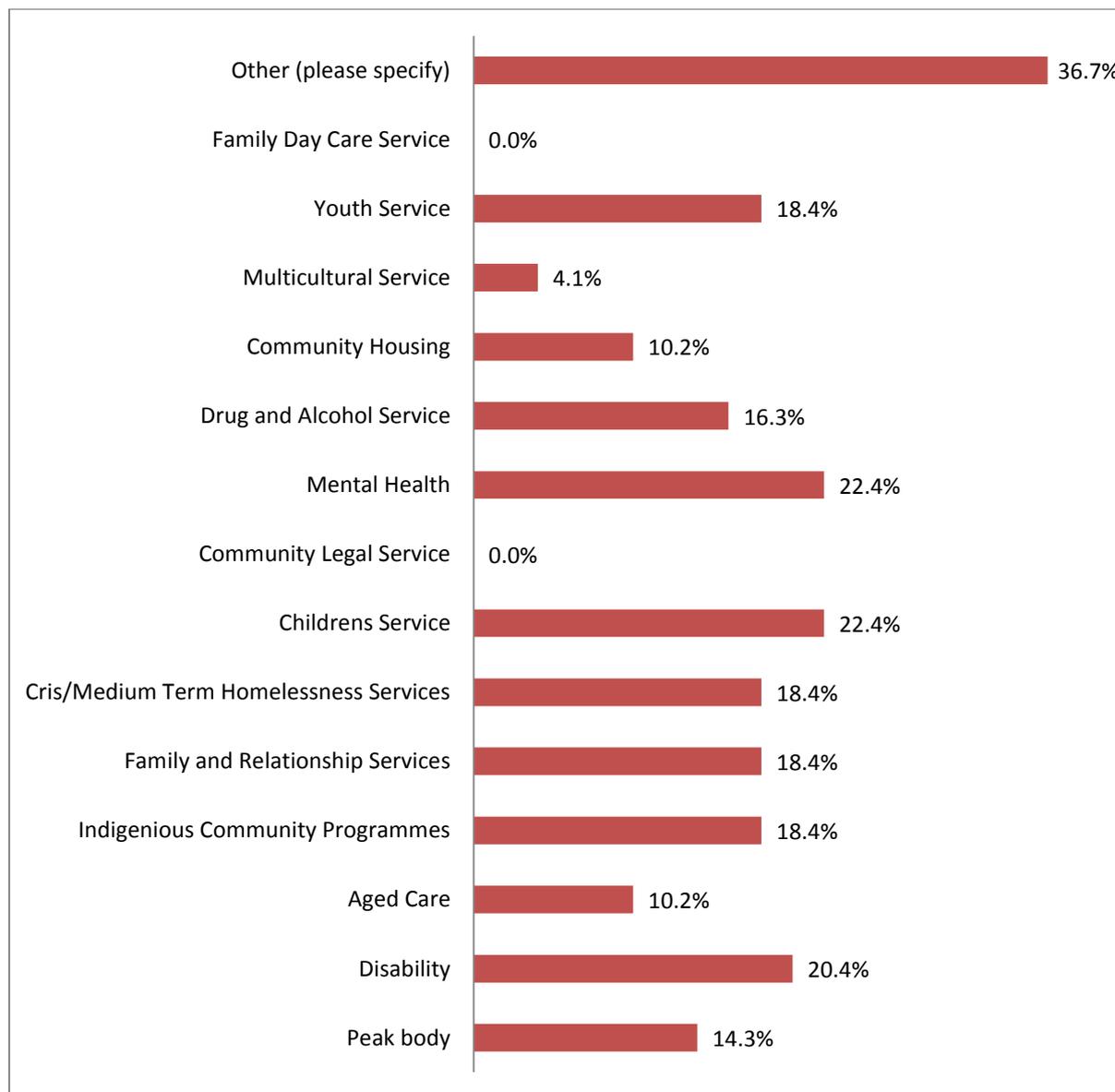


Figure 1.5 Organisations according to primary area of service provision

Services Direct Service Staff are Employed In

Figure 1.6 illustrates the array of services Direct Service worker respondents are employed in.

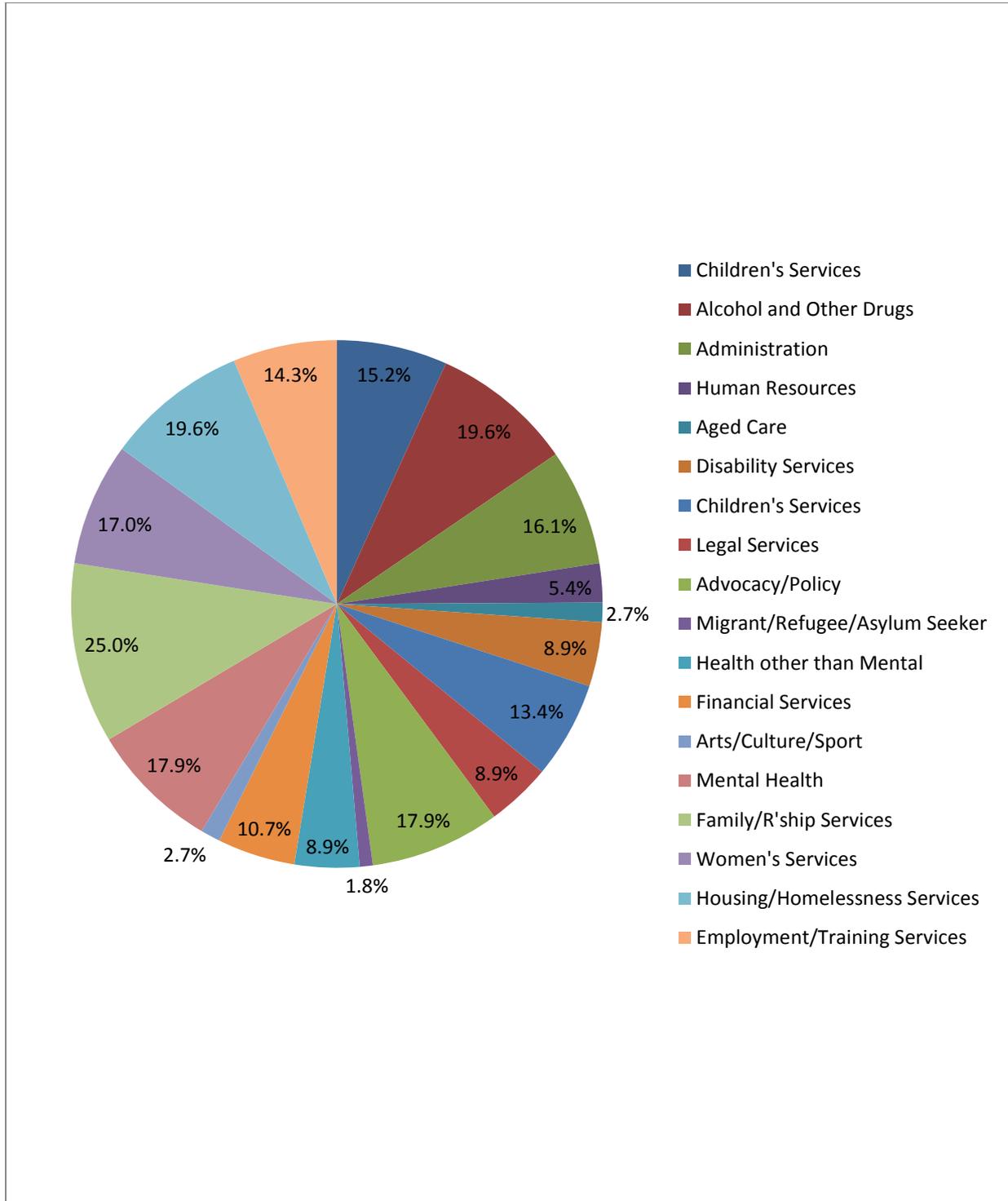


Figure 1.6 Services Direct Service Staff are Employed In

2 Funding to Organisations

Community service organisations are funded in a variety of ways from an array of funding sources. This can impact on the delivery of services, types of services delivered, staff security and organisational viability.

Level of funding to organisations

For the purposes of this survey organisations (Manager respondents) were asked to define their organisation by level of annual income (Figure 2.1) and its source (Figure 2.2). The variation in income is reflected in Figure 2.1. A percentage of respondents are from large Territory wide and National organisations which attract large sums of money for the provision of services across the Northern Territory (see Figure 1.4). The largest percentage of funding for organisations comes from the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth Government.

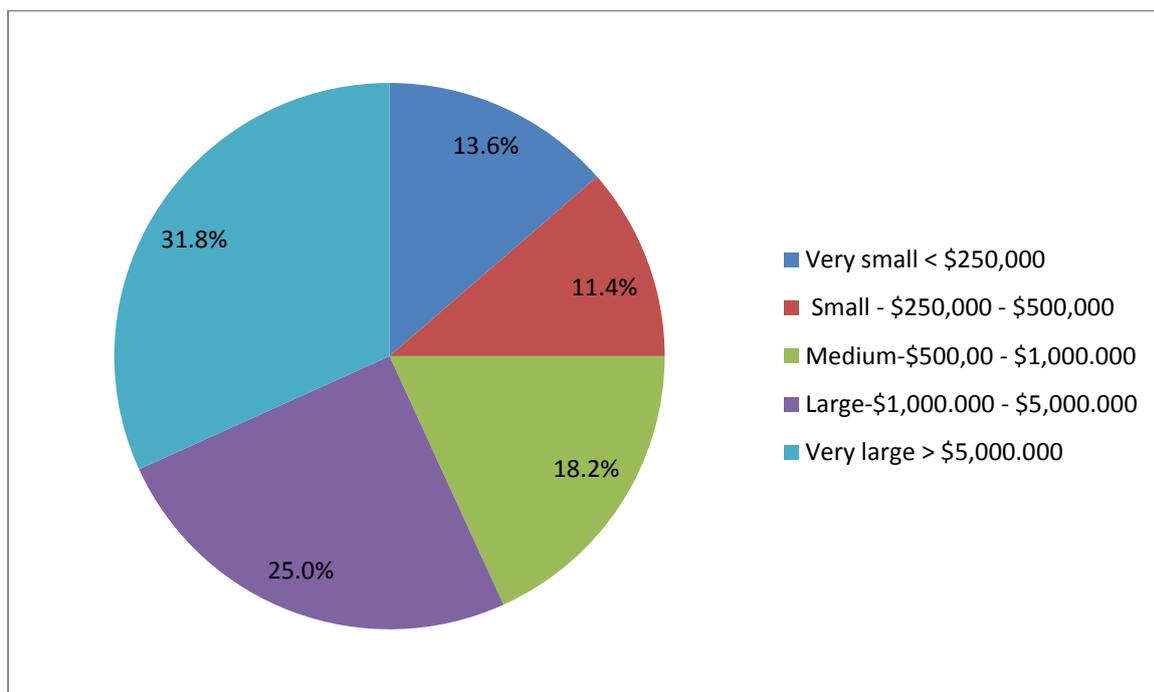


Figure 2.1 Level of funding to organisations

Sources of and impact to Funding

Respondents were asked to identify the sources of funding to their organisation (see Figure 2.2). When surveyed about the key issues impacting on their organisation Manager respondents stated that funding levels and models of funding impacting on program delivery and growing areas of unmet need were significant (see Figure 2.3).

It is noteworthy that over 60 per cent of Managers specified growing areas of un met need as an issue for their organisation. When demand outstrips the capacity to supply services, organisations can rationalise services by altering eligibility criteria or limiting the scope and creativity of their services.

This can focus on reacting to crises and people's immediate needs rather than the deep, difficult underlying or structural issues. Alternatively, funding policy and practices can target very specific client groups and require precise outputs. This can result in services being focussed on less complex or demanding clients so specific contractual measures are met (for example collecting statistics), thus meeting contractual guidelines to ensure continual funding.

The impact of contractual funding arrangements can change an organisations ability to advocate for their client.

The nature of Community Service work in the NT, where agencies are sparse and have to deal with structural complications (long distances, lack of affordable staffing accommodation or no accommodation and significant travel cost and time) and a lack of on going referral options or over extended services and the complex needs of clients impact significantly on services in the Northern Territory.

Comments made by respondents included:

'other organisations receiving funding to provide a service very similar to ours, in the same regions without discussion with us- from either gov't or service providers'

'lack of resources to meet change' and the 'lack of accommodation in remote communities for staff'.

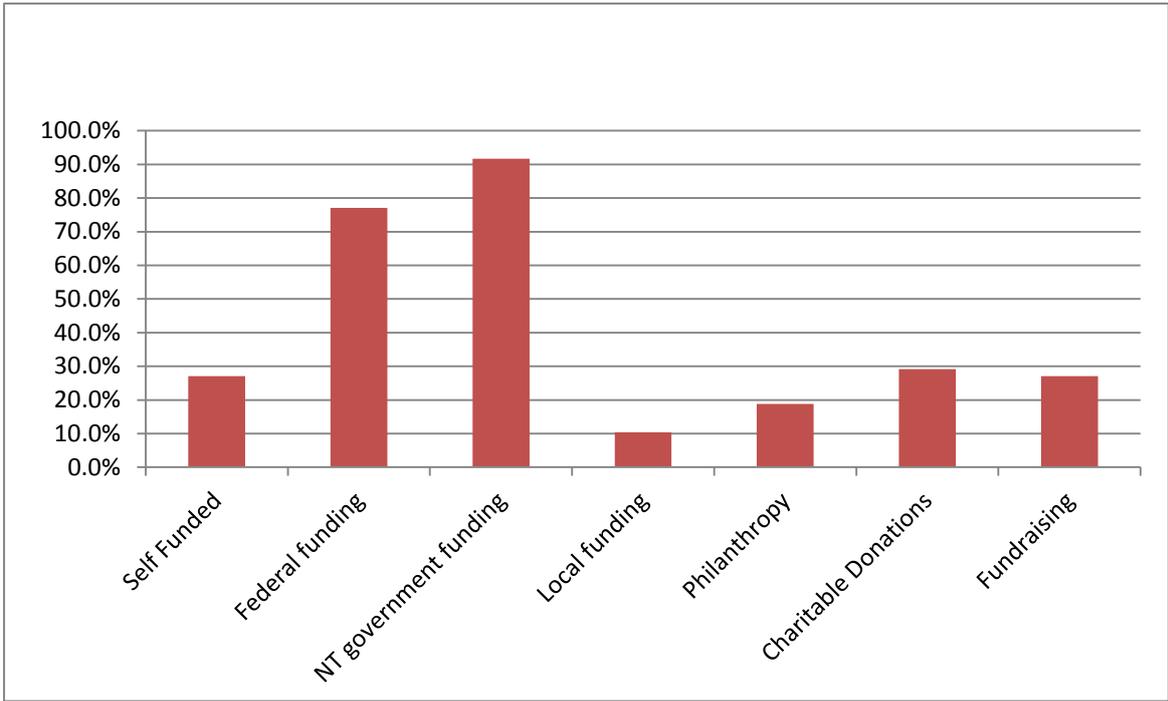


Figure 2.2 Sources of funding

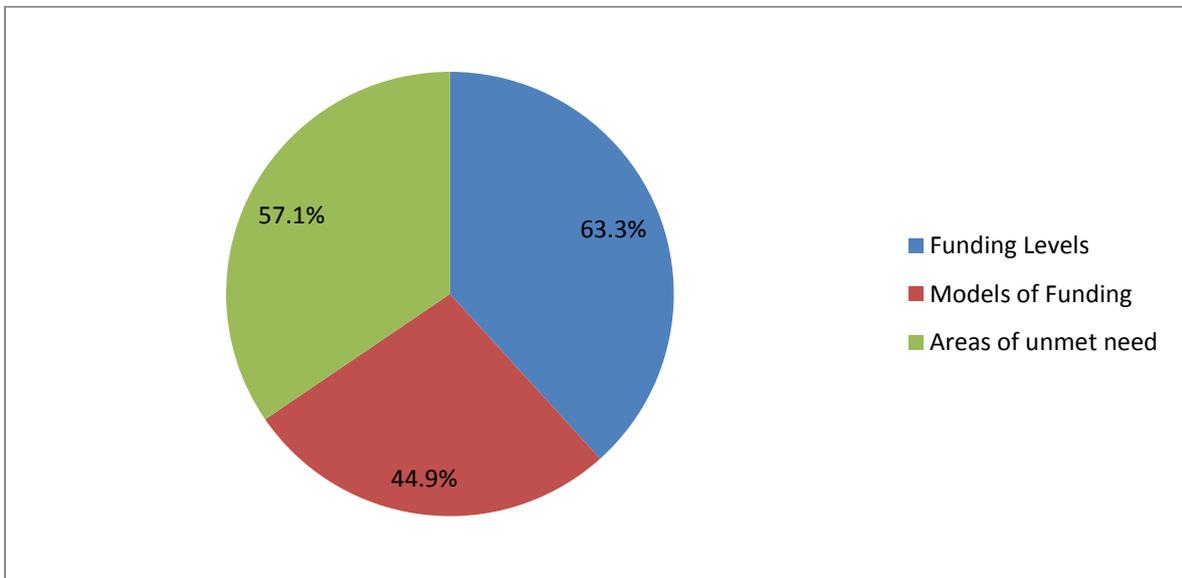


Figure 2.3 Impact to funding

3 Workforce Issues

Concerns about workforce sustainability, attraction and retention of staff and succession planning are all issues that impact on the Community Service Sector in the NT. Developing, supporting and sustaining the community sector workforce continues to challenge the sector.

Issues for Management

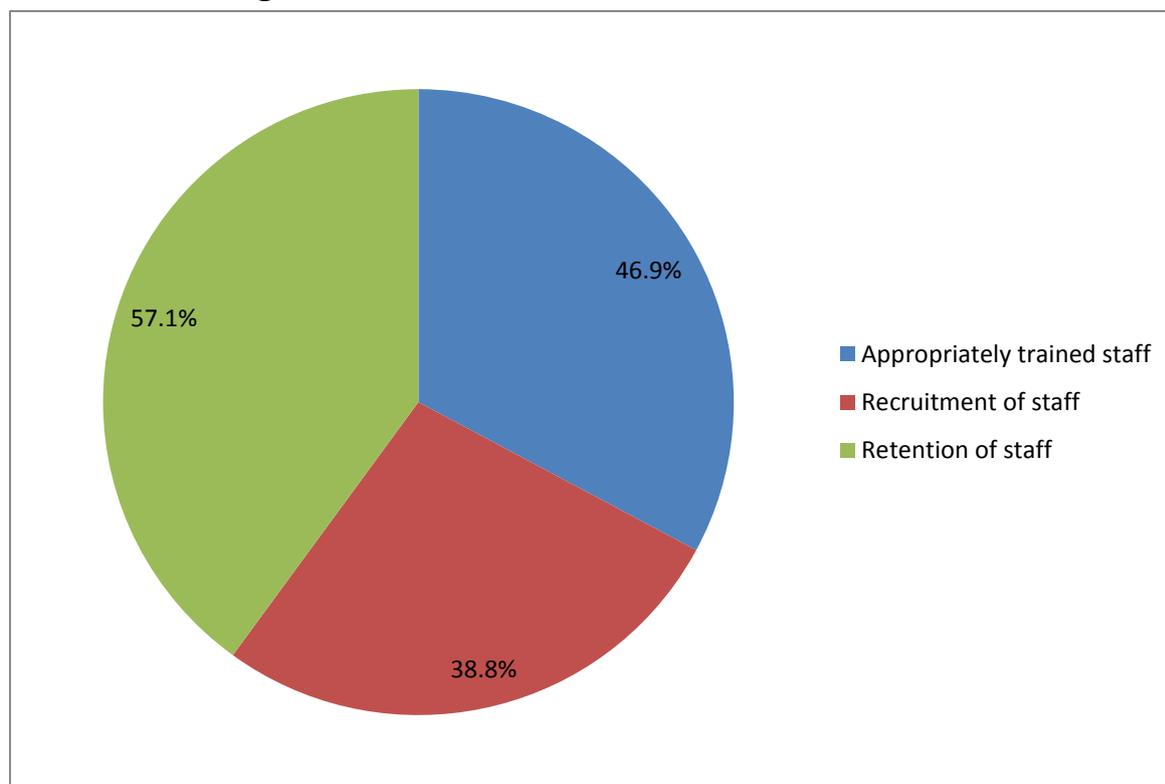


Figure 3.1 Issues for Management

Managers were asked (apart from funding issues – see Figure 2.3) what the most significant issues concerning their workforce are.

There was a relatively even distribution of responses; retention of staff was highlighted, recruitment and appropriately trained staff matching positions was important, see Figure 3.1.

Following on from this question managers were asked about the skill and capacity level of their staff to perform their duties. We hear, anecdotally that staff are working above their skill levels. The majority of managers rated their staff as moderately skilled or above (Figure 3.2). This corresponds with Figure 3.3 which asked direct service staff how often they felt they lacked the skills to do their job. Many things can impact on how these questions are answered for example what is happening on the day, newness to the position, the support available to a staff member and so on.

Managers perceptions of the skill level of Staff

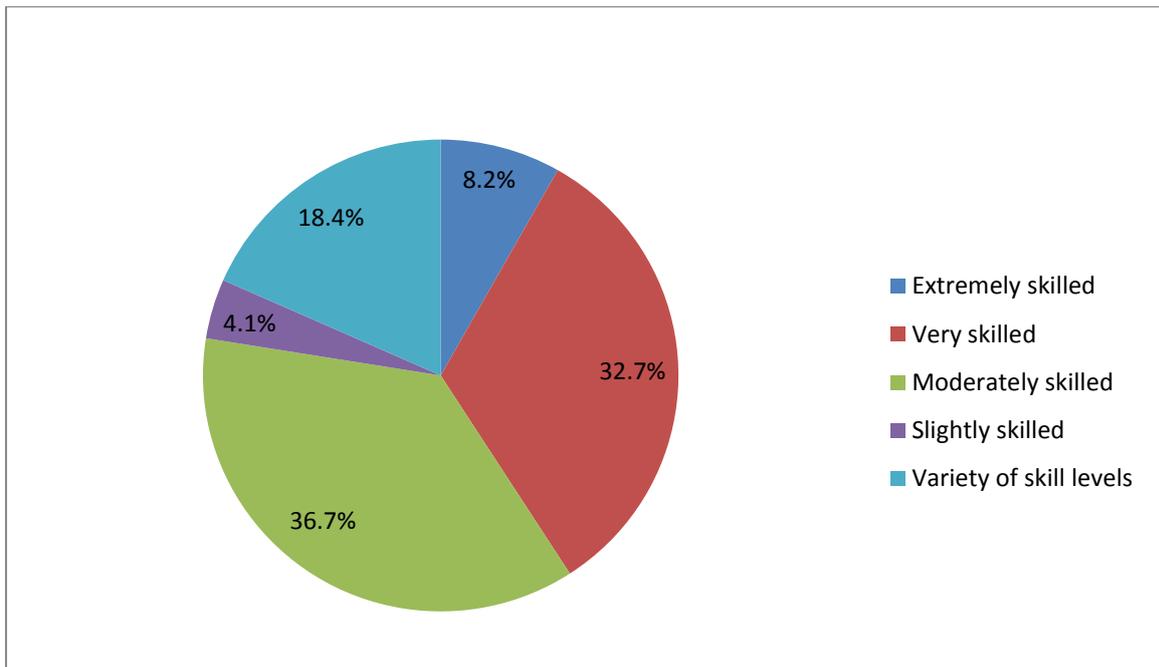


Figure 3.2 Managers perceptions of the skill level of Staff

Direct Service Workers Perception of Skills to undertake their job

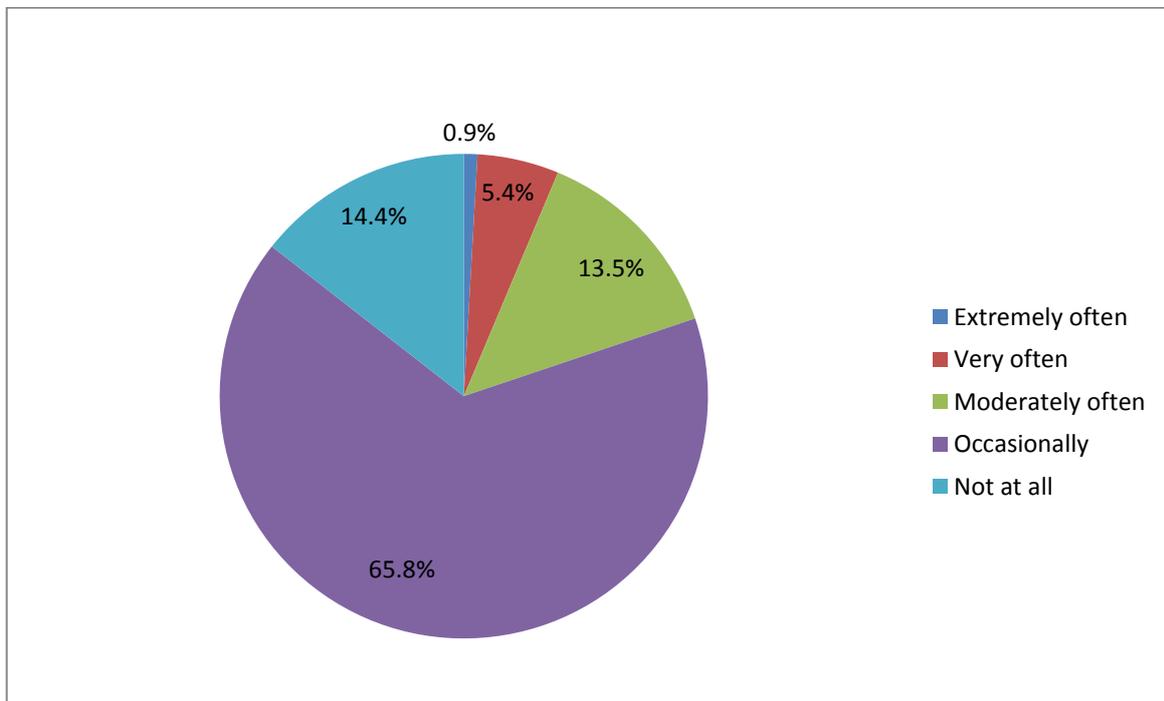


Figure 3.3 Direct Service Workers Perception of Skills to undertake their job

Training Useful for Organisation

Respondents were asked to rate topics they considered would be useful for training and development in their organisation. Service delivery evaluation was highly rated followed by an equal distribution of requests for management/coaching skills, writing grant and funding applications and learning about quality assurance systems (Figure 3.4). Direct Service staff nominated mentoring/training as something that would assist them (Figure 3.5). In hindsight it would have been useful to identify or clarify what people were meaning when they responded to this question in this manner.

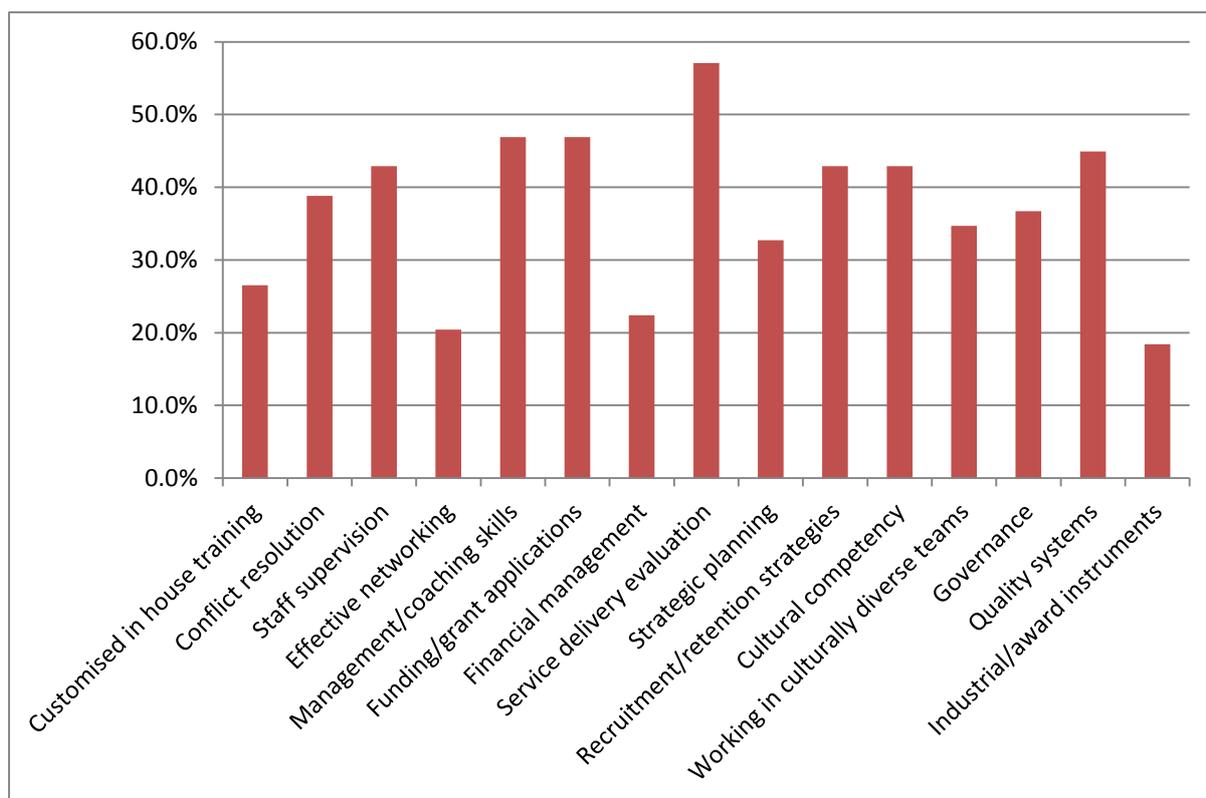


Figure 3.4 Training Useful for Organisation

Direct Service Staff – support needs

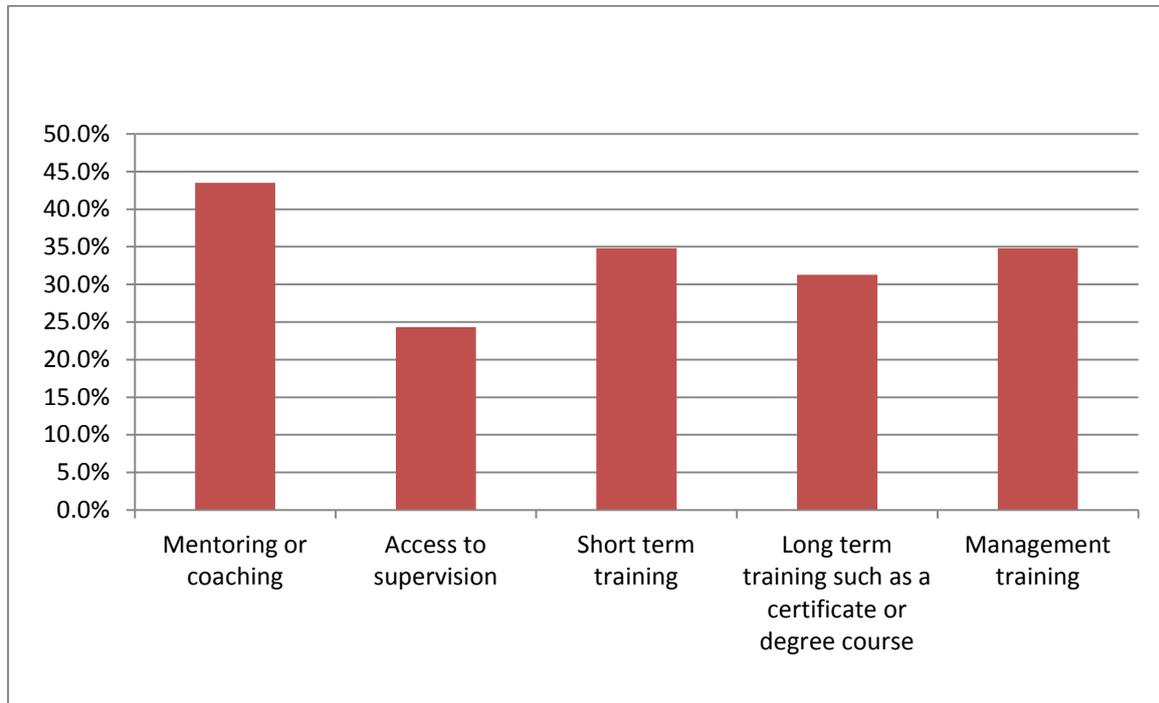


Figure 3.5 Direct Service Staff – support needs

Figure 3.5 demonstrates suggestions direct service workers identified that could assist them in their present position. Other suggestions included access to a budget for professional development, external supervision and more opportunities for short term training, that is training delivered at and in the workplace to counteract time away due to travel and distance. Workers indicated that sometimes training was not worth it due to the back log of work they returned to at their place of work.

Levels of Formal Education (Managers and Direct Service Workers)

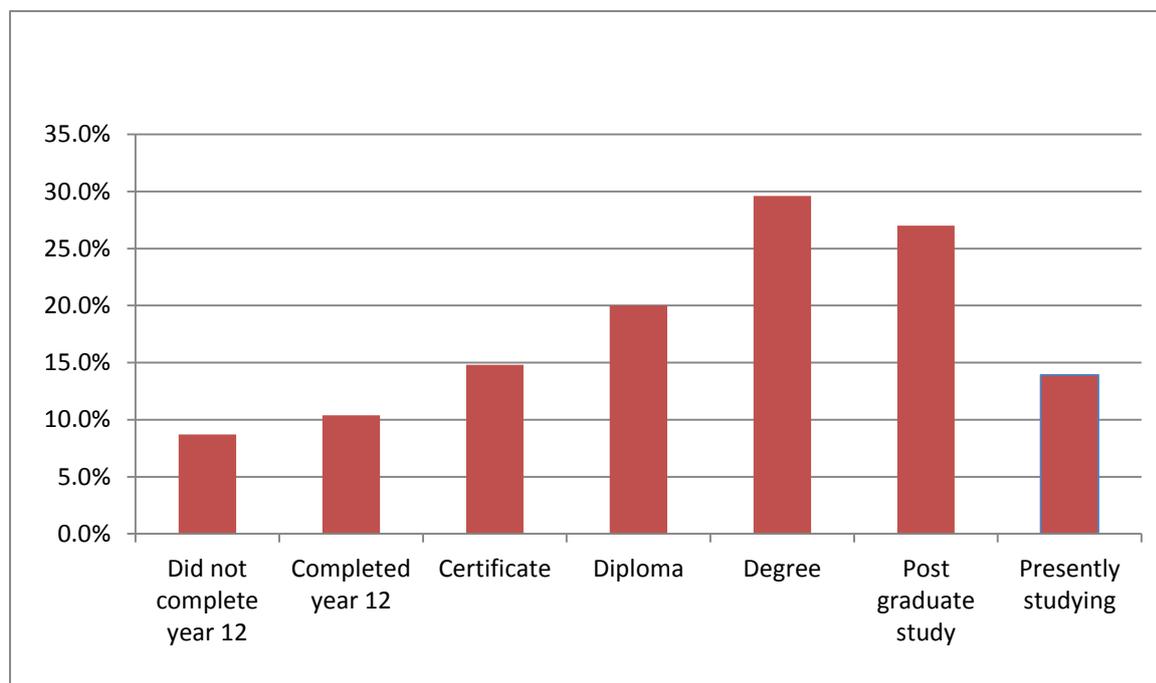


Figure 3.6 Levels of Formal Education (Managers and Direct Service Workers)

The majority of staff who responded to the survey have a higher education degree and/or are upskilling and undertaking education to enhance their skills and capacity to perform their work, showing a dedication and commitment to their work (Figure 3.6). This question needs to be understood in context. It could be that people in the organisation, with formal education and training had more access to the survey and are more likely to respond to a written, computer generated survey.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) workers in community service industries in May 2010 were more likely to have educational attainment at a Year 12 level or higher than people employed in all industries (82% compared with 76%), they were less likely to have completed a bachelor level degree or higher (20% compared with 26%). Even after taking into account the effect of different age profiles, these differences were still evident.

However, workers in community service occupations were more likely to be enrolled in some form of study than people employed in all industries. In May 2010, 20% of community service workers were engaged in formal learning during the year, compared with 15% for workers in all industries. Moreover, this proportion for community service workers increased when adjusted to account for differences in age (ABS 2011).

Staffing

High staff turnover is consistently cited as an issue and challenge for Community Sector Organisations (ACOSS 2012). Staff turnover can be a major loss to an organisation, draining organisational knowledge and resources. Recruitment and retention impact on planning, program delivery and staff morale.

Ongoing vacant positions in organisations

Managers were asked if their organisation had continuing vacant positions. Roughly 43% of agencies had ongoing vacant positions with some positions being unoccupied for over three months (Figure 3.7). Traditional methods such as newspaper advertisements are used to recruit new staff, see Figure 3.8.

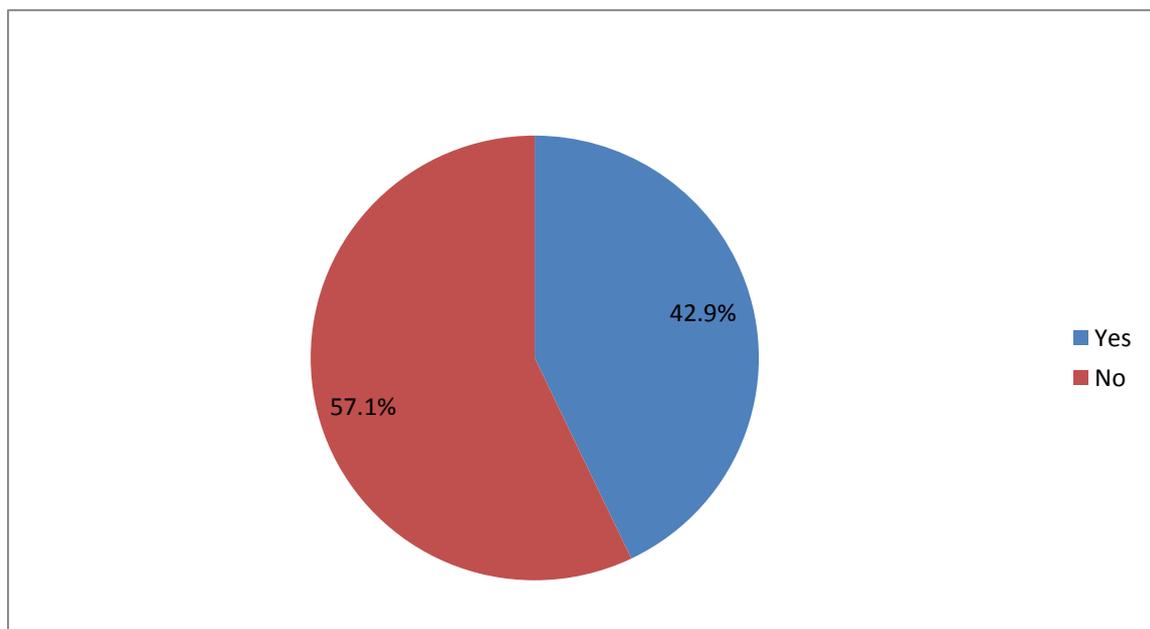


Figure 3.7 Ongoing vacant positions in organisations

Methods used to attract staff

Methods most commonly used to attract/recruit staff were Newspaper advertisements and word of mouth as shown in Figure 3.8. Newspapers included local and National newspapers and websites included the organisations own website and sites such as the NTCOSS website.

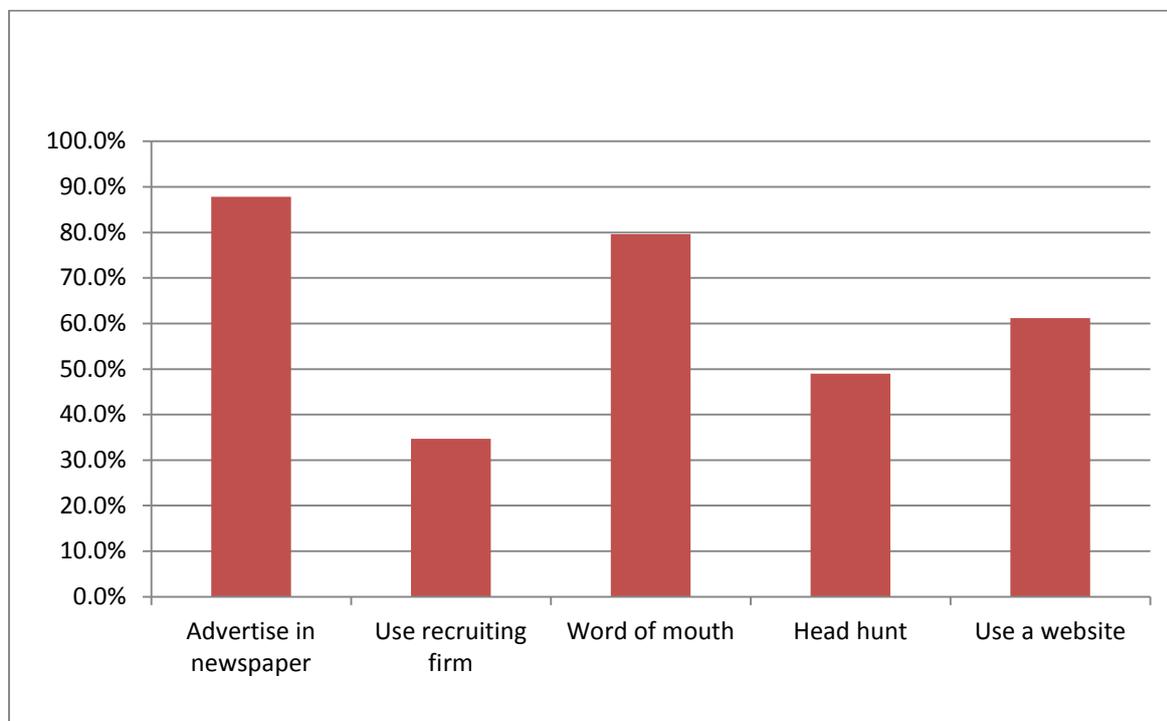


Figure 3.8 Methods used to attract staff

4 Working in the Community Sector in the Northern Territory

Respondents were asked how long they have worked in the Community Sector in the NT.

There is a perception that staff in the sector in the Territory are rather transitory, however as illustrated in Figure 4.1 the majority of managers have been in the Sector for over three years. Direct Service workers had worked in the Sector for less time than Managers which would be expected due to new graduates becoming employed in the sector and to the natural progression to management. The question did not ascertain how long respondents had been in the organisation they are currently employed in. Respondents were then asked how long they intended to continue working in the Community Sector (see Figure 4.2). One fifth of managers currently working in the sector plan to retire within the next 5 years and roughly a third are considering leaving in one to five years (Figure 4.3). These are the present managers in the Sector and examining these figures, it appears it will be important to capture and transfer knowledge to and for the next generation of staff and management. Over half the Direct Service Workers plan to leave the sector in the next 5 years, illustrating the importance of attracting new staff to the sector and considering the importance of staff retention (Figure 4.4)

Time in the sector - Managers

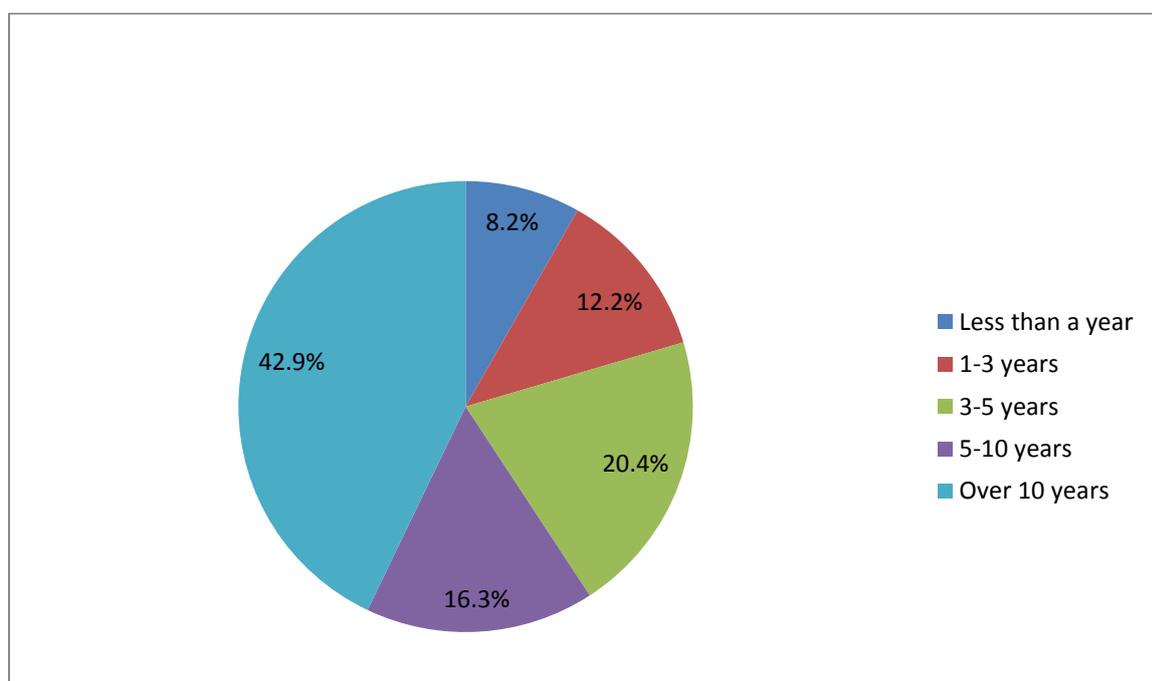


Figure 4.1 Time in the sector - Managers

Time in the sector – Direct Service Workers

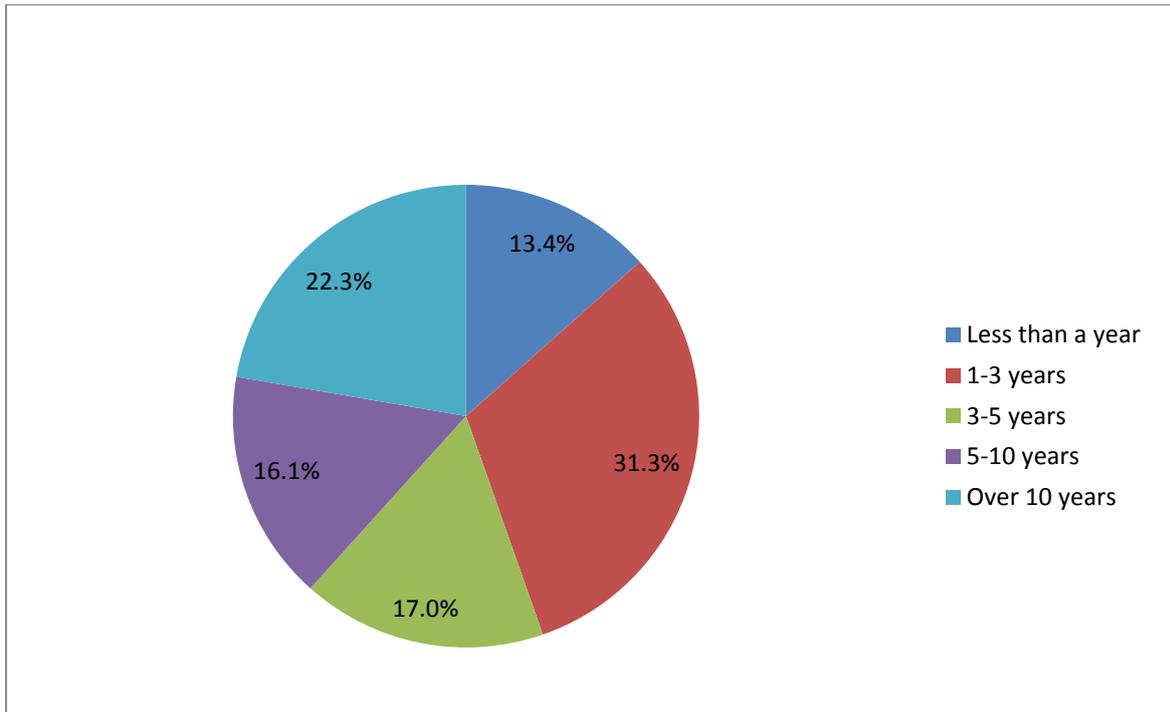


Figure 4.2 Time in the sector – Direct Service Workers

Length of time to go in Community Services Sector in NT - Managers

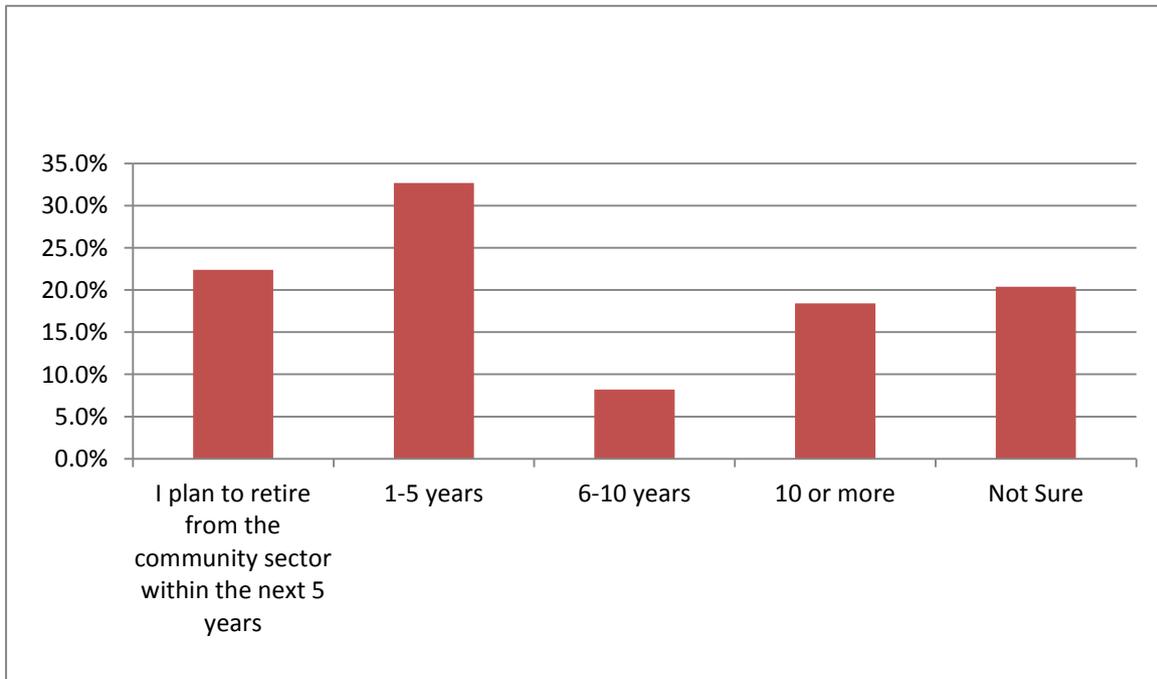


Figure 4.3 Length of time to go in Community Services Sector in NT - Managers

Length of time to go in Community Services Sector in NT – Direct Service Workers

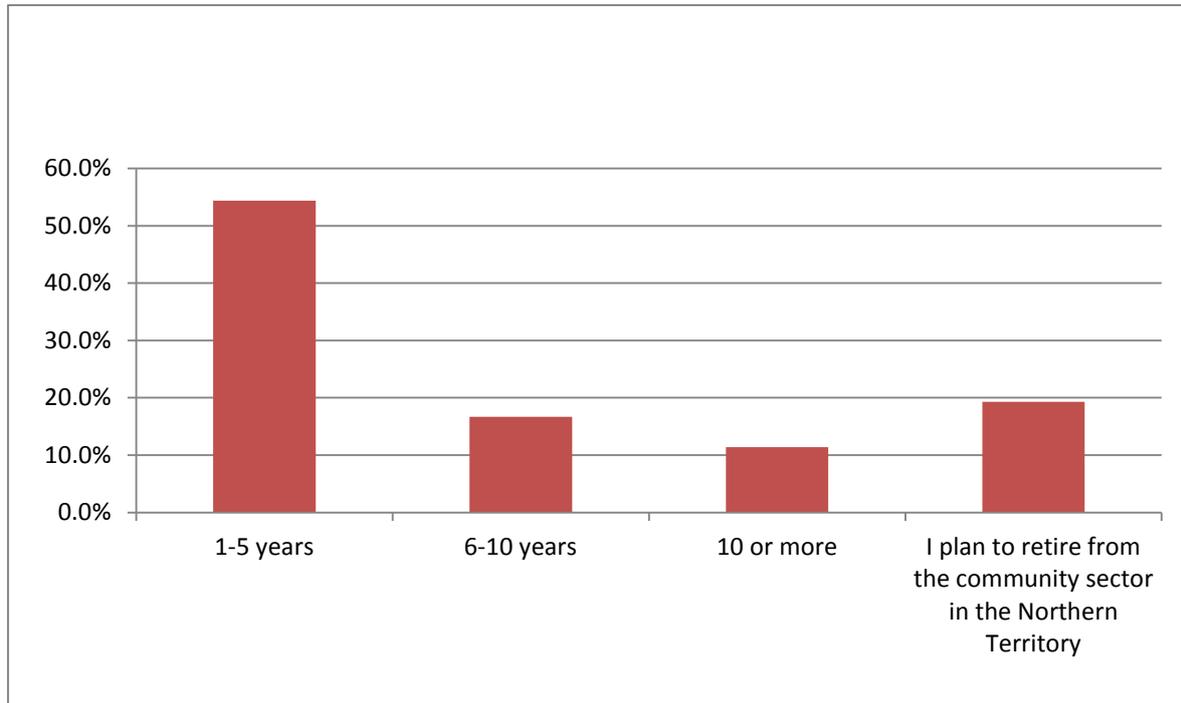


Figure 4.4 Length of time to go in Community Services Sector in NT – Direct Service Workers

Direct Service Workers – Considering Leaving the Sector

Direct service workers were asked if they were considering leaving their workplace for another Community Service organisation within the next year (Figure 4.5). This illustrates the churning that is constant in the sector in the Northern Territory and elsewhere.

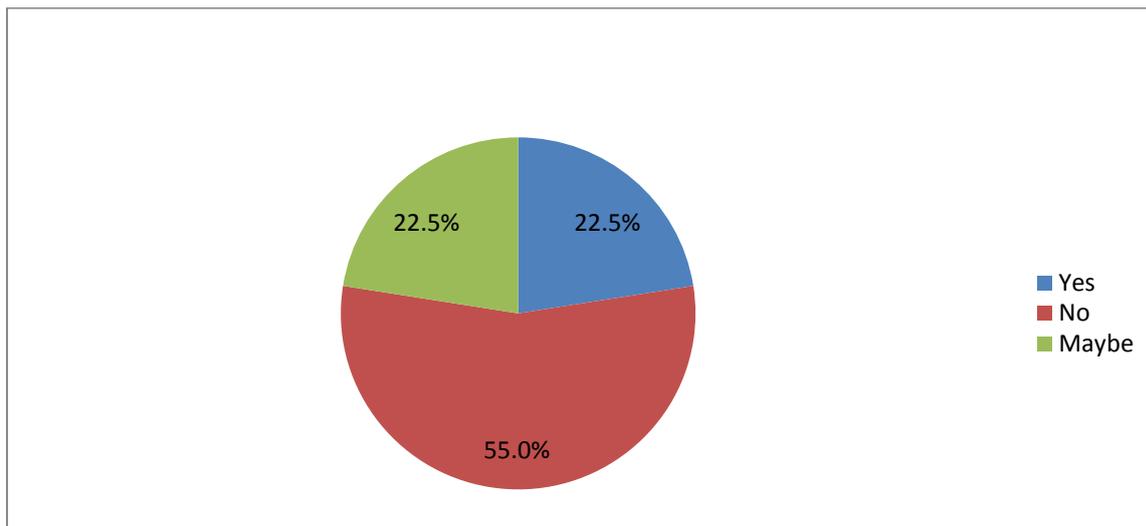


Figure 4.5 Direct Service Workers – Considering Leaving the Sector

Reasons given for Considering leaving Employment

Workers identified a number of reasons for considering changing or leaving the workplace (Figure 4.6). Career opportunities elsewhere, lack of flexibility in the workplace and lack of support were all reasons for leaving. A number of these issues can be dealt with within an organisation that is committed to staff retention and satisfaction. Flexibility and lack of flexibility in the work place were positive and negative respectively. 'Other' reasons stated for considering leaving were things such as travel, reached a ceiling, language barriers and workplace conflict.

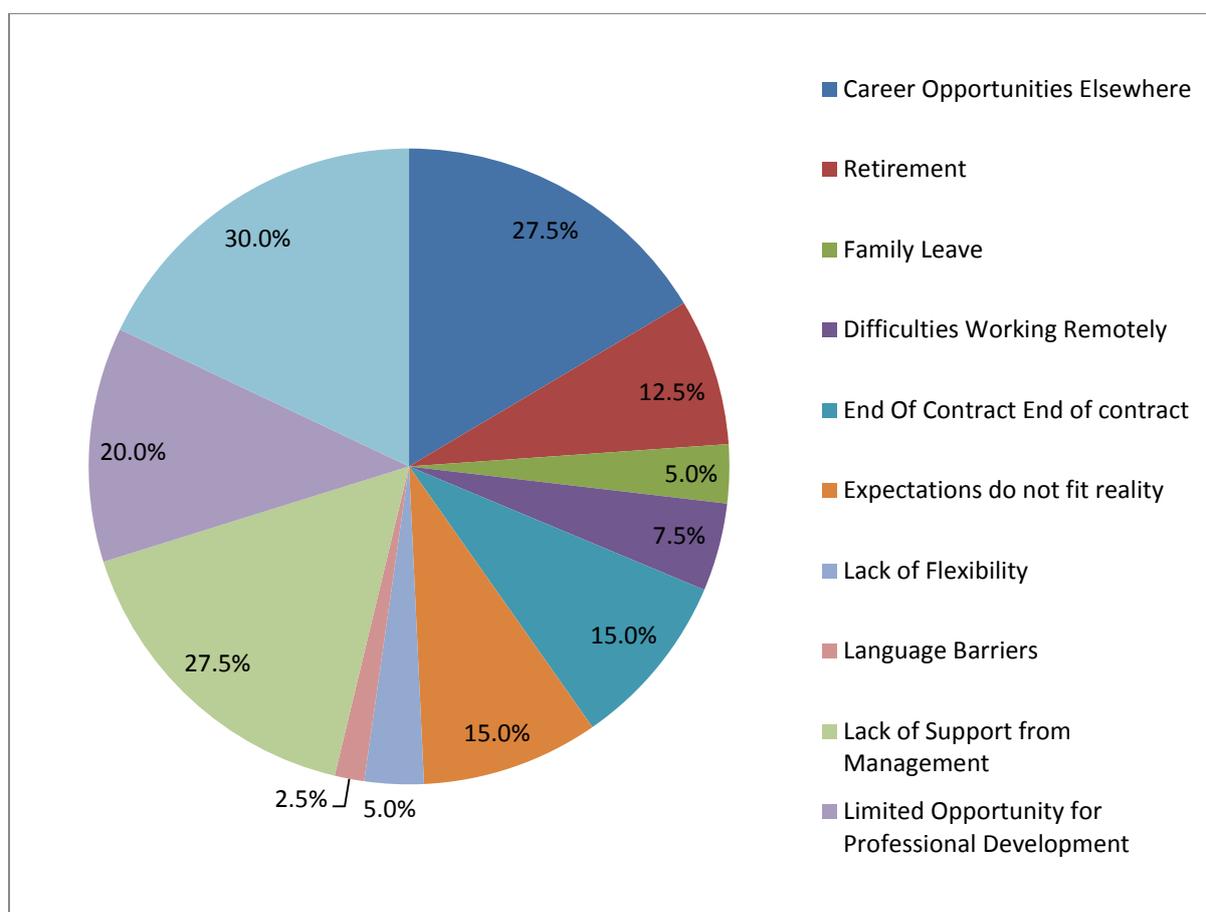


Figure 4.6 Reasons given for Considering leaving Employment

5 Motivation

Respondents were asked to rate statements regarding their motivation to work in the Community Services Sector.

Both Managers and Direct Services workers rated highly commitment to work and work satisfaction and believing in the work that is done as their highest motivators to remaining in their current positions (Figure 5.1 and 5.2). Professional isolation and lack of support and distance from family were cited as reasons to consider moving from the Territory. Depending on the organisation a respondent was employed in responses varied. Flexibility and lack of flexibility in the work place were positive and negative respectively.

Why I work in the Sector - Managers

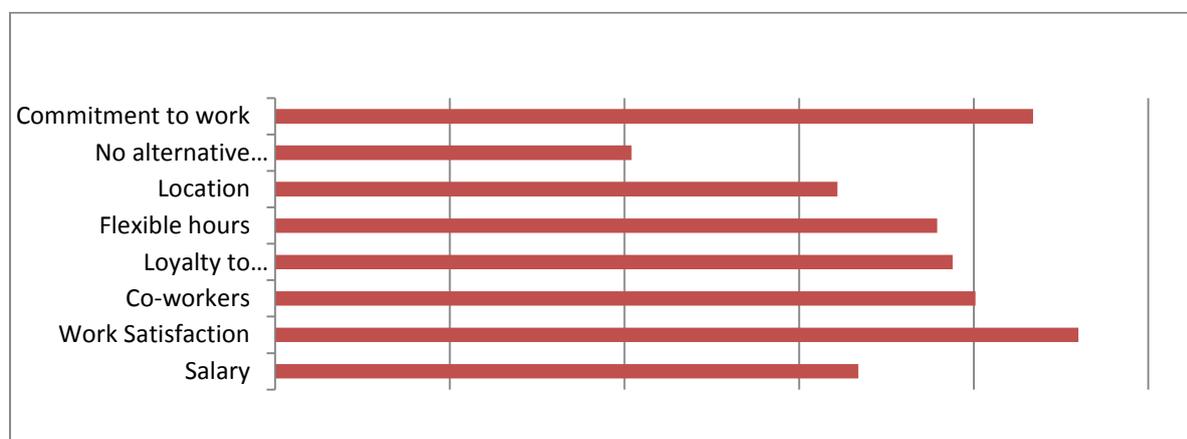


Figure 5.1 Why I work in the Sector - Managers

Why I work in the Sector – Direct Service Workers

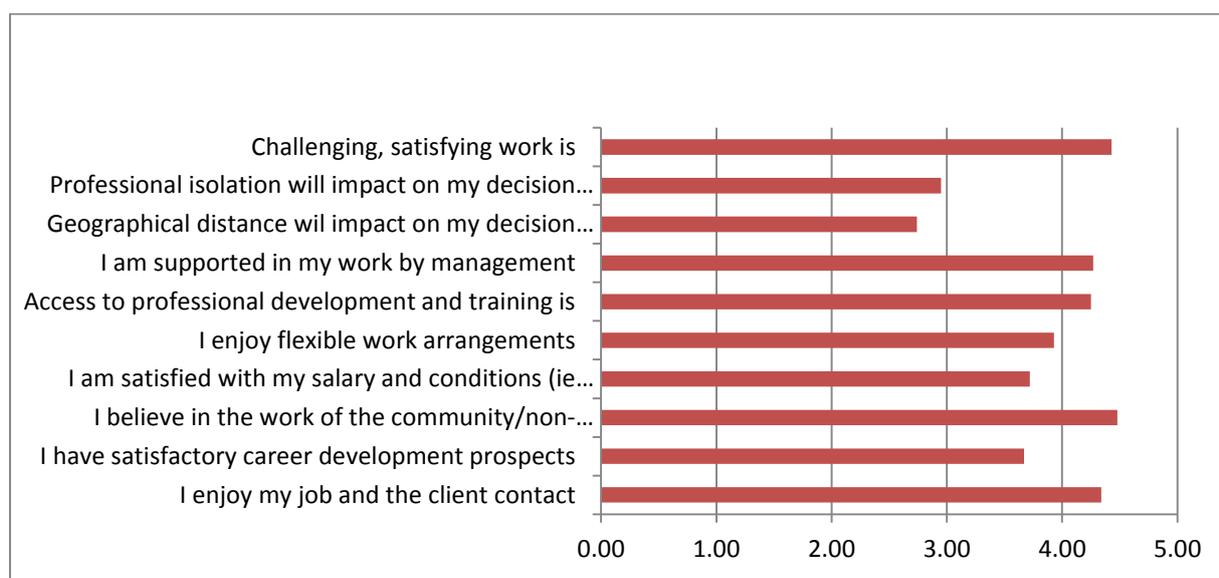


Figure 4.2 Why I work in the Sector – Direct Service Workers

5 About You

Women form the majority of people who work in community service industries. In 2010-11, women represented 84% of workers in community service industries, compared with 45% of workers in all industries (ABS).

The majority of survey respondents were female reflecting the gender distribution of workers across the sector (Figure 5.1).

Gender of Respondents

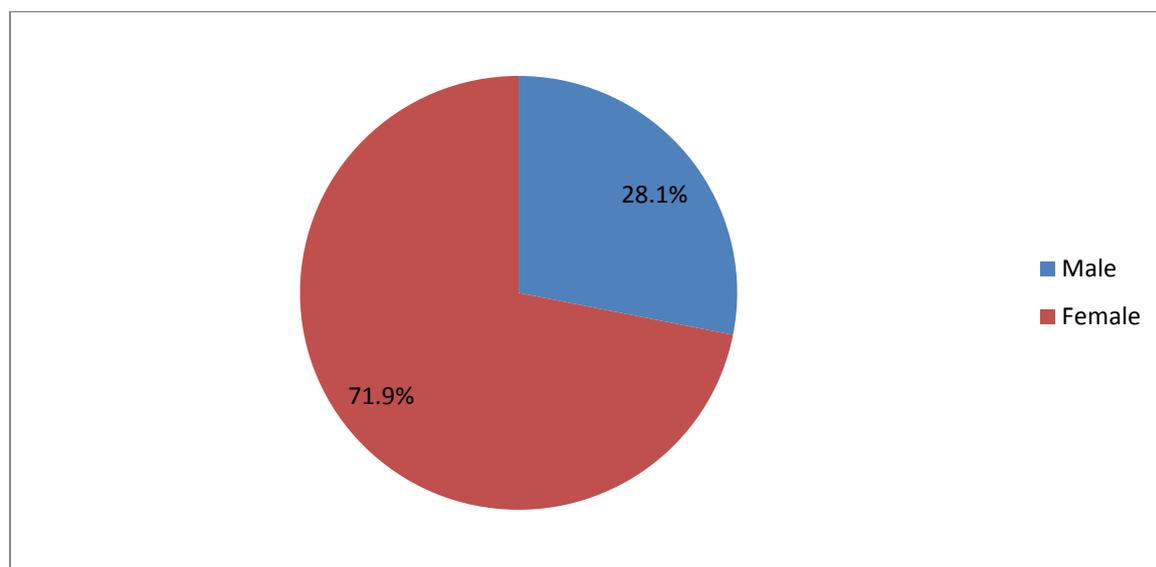


Figure 5.1 Gender of Respondents

Identity of Respondents

Most of the respondents who work in the sector identified themselves as Non Indigenous (Figure 5.2) Aboriginal Territorians are working successfully in a wide range of professional and wage jobs, and higher numbers are participating in training that links to employment each year. In 2010, Indigenous labour force participation rates were 43.6% compared to 80% for non-Aboriginal Territorians.

While Aboriginal engagement in the workforce is increasing, Aboriginal workers have not yet achieved proportionally equivalent employment participation rates relative to the wider NT population. Research suggests the following initiatives may support increased engagement of Indigenous people in employment:

- establishing partnerships with specific sectors to develop workforce plans and commitments to jobs

- more hands-on business support to assist business navigate through available Indigenous employment services and to support business and workers through the early stages of employment
- In conjunction with employers, develop mobility and labour hire approaches to link Indigenous workers to jobs (Northern Territory Department of Business 2012).

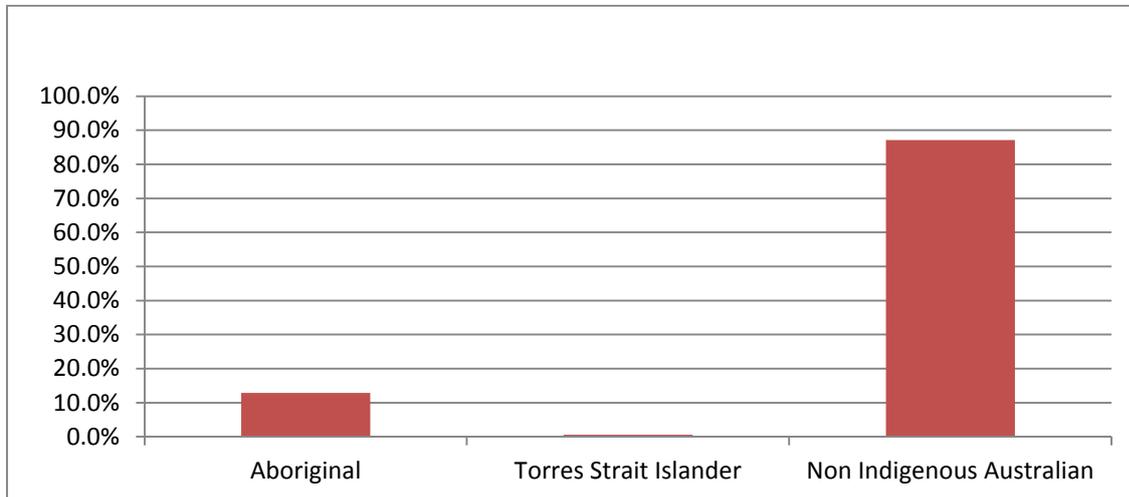


Figure 5.2 Identity of Respondents

What is your First Language

English is the first language of the majority of respondents in the Community Services Sector, see figure 5.3. Of the 5.3% for whom English is not their first language, one respondent stated her first language was an Aboriginal language and the other respondents spoke a variety of European languages.

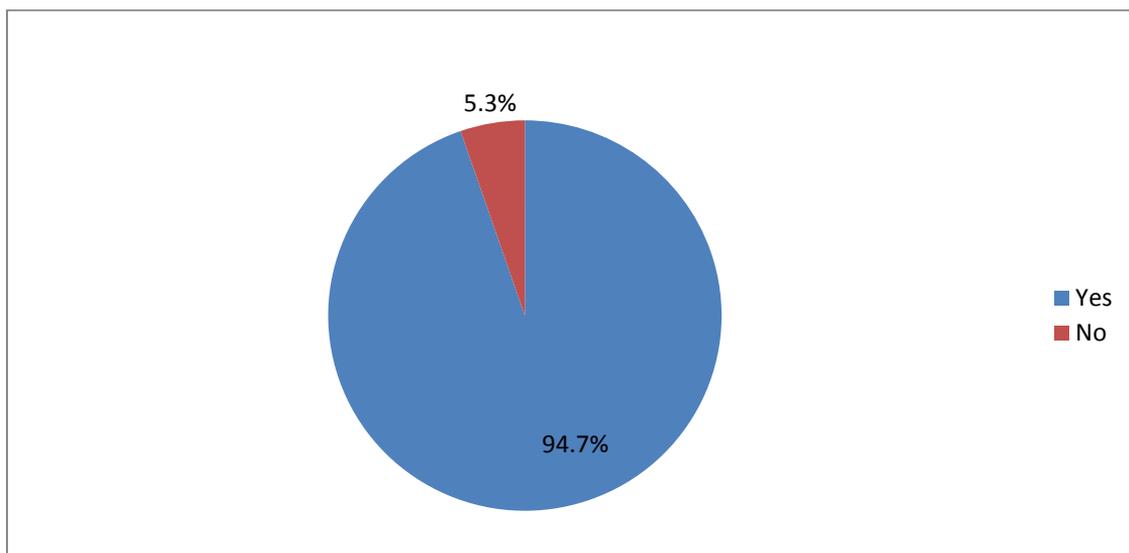


Figure 5.3 What is your First Language

Age of Respondents

Respondents employed in the sector are in their thirties with the vast majority 40 or above (see Figure 5.4). This highlights the need to attract the next generation of staff to the sector.

Kryger, 2005 states that National trends of an ageing population and workforce will impact on the sector. It is anticipated there will be an increasing demand for community services and ageing is expected to reduce the supply of community service workers (Allen Consulting, 2008: 19). Sustaining workforce supply is a particular challenge, as workers in the sector tend to be older; however in the NT the Aboriginal population is younger thus highlighting the need for attracting and recruiting an Aboriginal workforce to the sector.

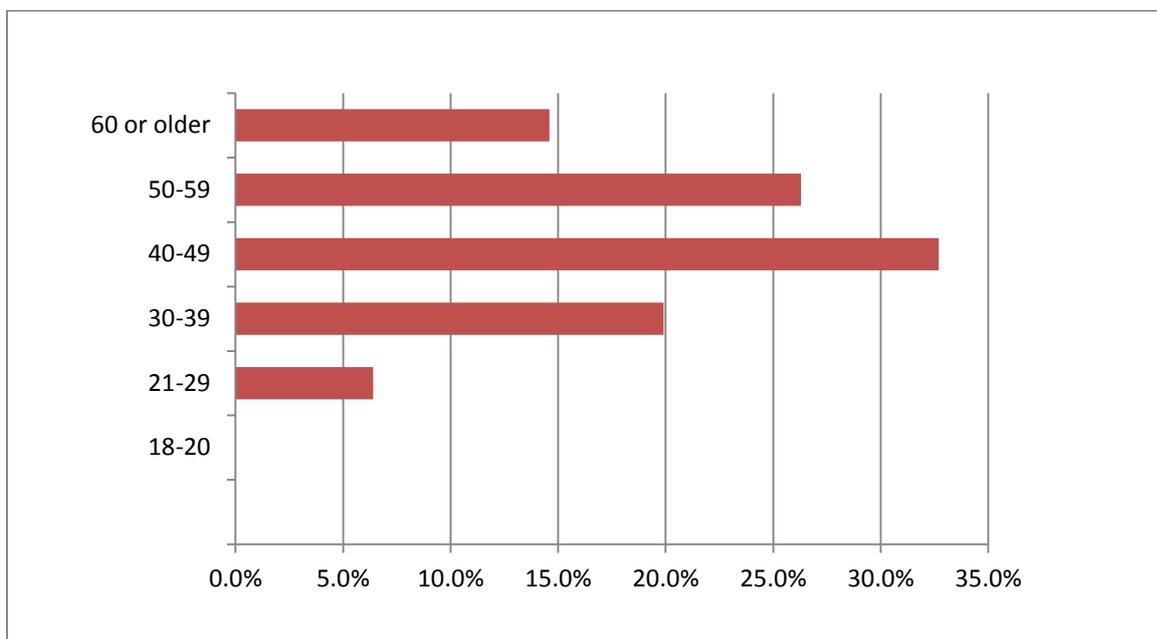


Figure 5.4 Age of Respondents

6 Additional Comments

Overall the majority of respondents were satisfied with their work and prospects in the Northern Territory. Most direct service workers considered NGOs were managed moderately well and improving. The majority of workers are working under the Modern Award and most employees say their job description matches their work. Managers state they have times when their work life balance is unbalanced, however they are aware of this. Direct Service workers state that at certain times of the year they are over worked and at other times their time is managed well.

There were many requests for training, some feasible some not. Respondents stated training was the ideal however not always apt or applicable to their current work situations and the context of the Northern Territory.

This survey was a snapshot in time and should be considered that, many variables impact on survey responses.

Industrial Instruments

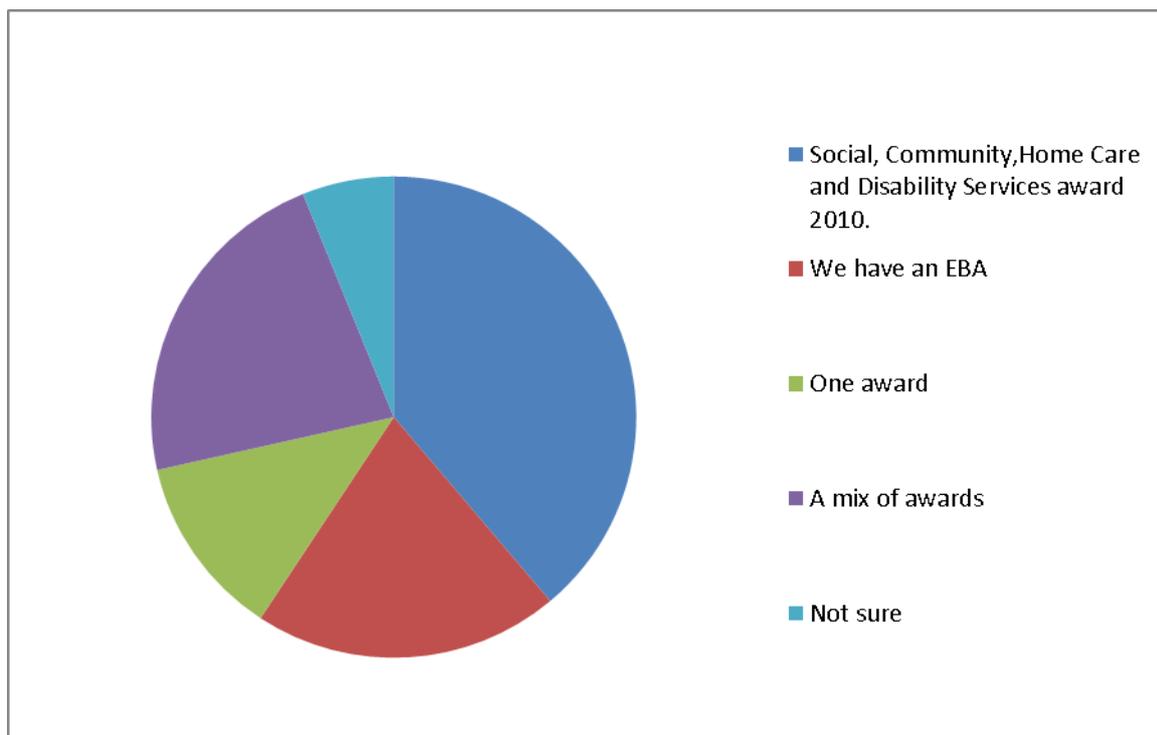


Figure 6.1 Industrial Instruments

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