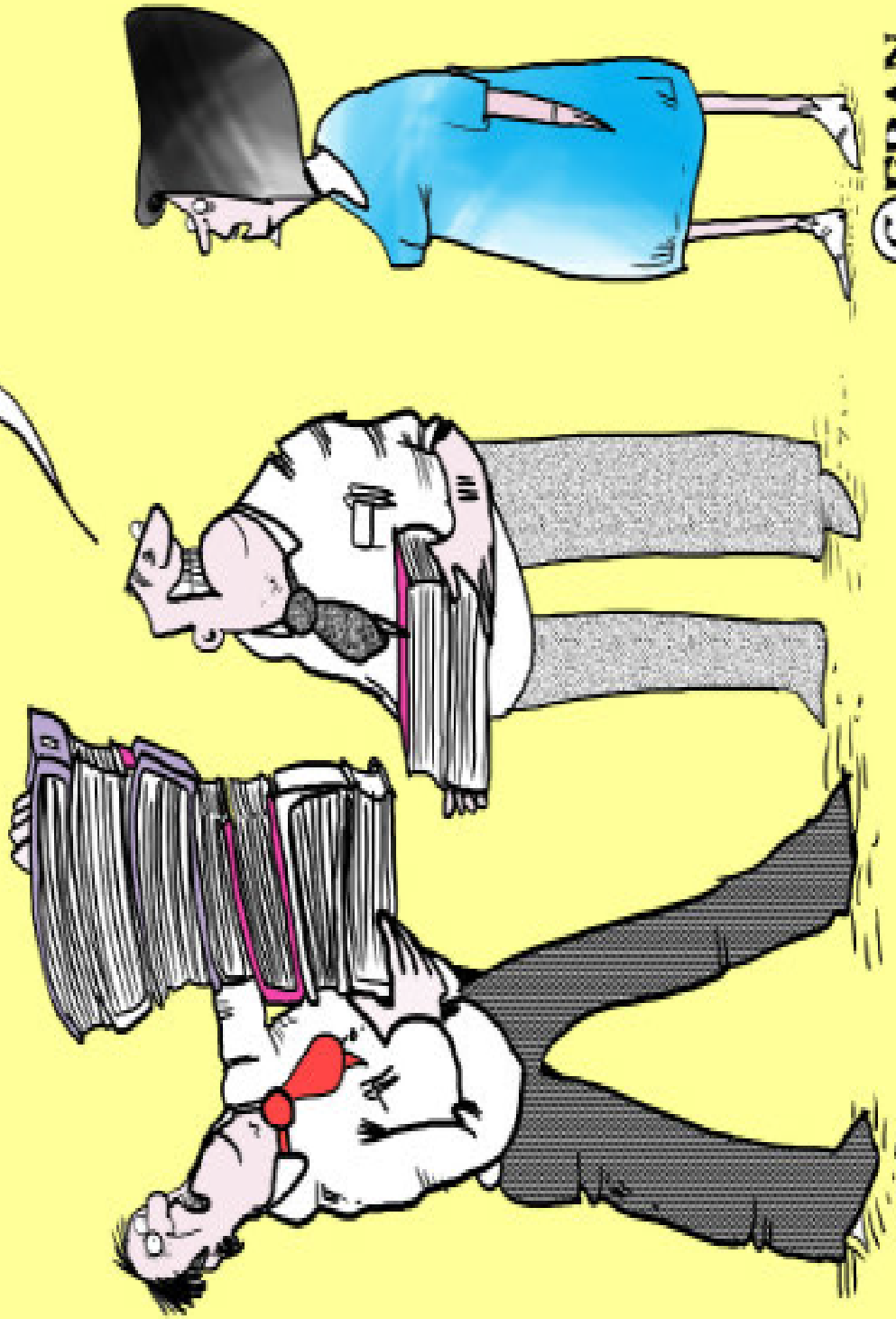


**IT'S OUR LATEST CASELOAD  
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM...WE JUST  
KEEP ADDING FILES UNTIL HE  
FALLS OVER!**



**©FRAN**

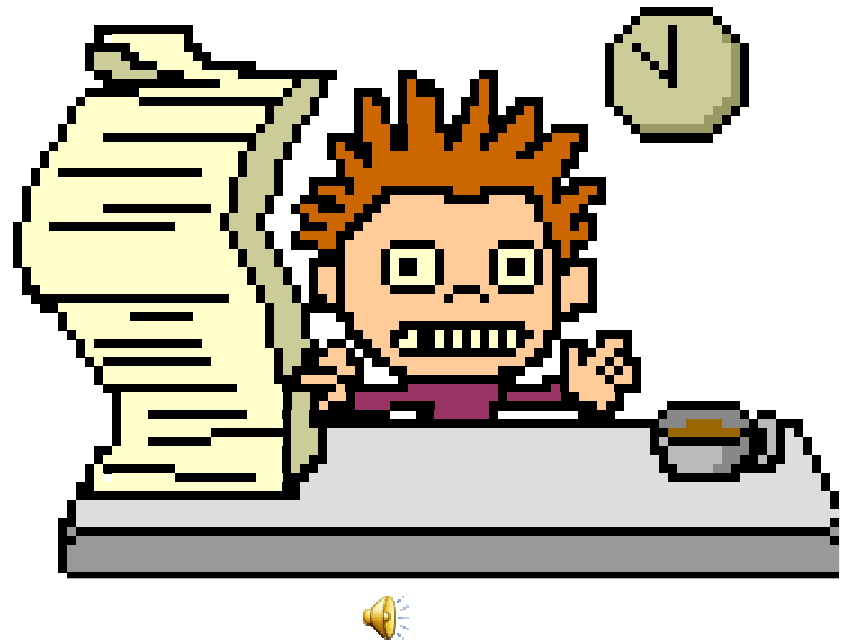
Feeling the heat:  
workers' experiences, knowledge  
and understanding of job stress in  
the Victorian Community Sector

Lorraine Harrison

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# Why I did this research?

- Occupational stress is quickly becoming the single greatest cause of occupational disease ... and can have far-reaching consequences for the worker and the workplace. (Noblet and LaMontagne, 2006)



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# Why?

- ‘Community sector workers are engaged in complex, difficult and demanding work, but are generally undervalued, underpaid and often work in relatively poor conditions. This female dominated sector is one of the lowest paid in Australia.’ (VCOSS 2010 p 101)
  - ‘The risk of psychological injuries is unacceptably high in the Victorian community sector.’ (Duffy, 2008)
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# Incidence of stress

- 'The community sector has consistently been one of the highest claim sectors for Work Safe Victoria and subsequently was included as a priority area for targeted action.' (VCOSS, 2007)
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# What is work stress?

- ... the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and injury. (Dollard, 2001)
  - ‘the reaction people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.’ (Duffy, 2008)
-

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# Work stress models

- Effort reward imbalance
    - ‘we are essentially dealing with people’s lives and that’s stressful, and how we are rewarded is just disgraceful.’ (Female, 1 year in CSS)
-

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# Work stress models

- Demand, control, support
    - ‘high work demands, but lack of autonomy and control, together with low supports, creates psychological distress.’  
(Dollard et al, 2000)
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# Work stress models

## ■ Burnout

- Standard model: workers become emotionally exhausted, depersonalise clients and experience a sense of lack of accomplishment.
  - Organisational: 'burnout more accurately applies to the character of the work, than to the physical responses of the worker.'  
(Sennett, 2006)
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# Work stress interventions

- Primary (pro-active)
  - Secondary (individual focus)
  - Tertiary (reactive)
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# What I found

- Charity volunteer model
  - Gender
  - Vocational aspects
  - Altruism
  - Loyalty
-

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# Volunteer charity model

- Historical overlay: Welfare work in Australia began as charity from ‘the respectable matrons’
  - ‘the historical undervaluation of care work and the driving down of wages in the sector is primarily the product of its roots in volunteerism and its highly feminised character.’ (Allebone, 2011)
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# Volunteerism

- Volunteerism still underpins the sector
  - ‘if you mentioned the word pay or anything to do with conditions ... we used to get the lecture about all the wonderful volunteers that do it for the love.’ (female, 22 years CSS)
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# The relevance of gender

- A gendered space:
  - ‘There is a lack of respect for caring and emotional work in general because it is seen as predominantly women’s work.’  
(Allebone, 2011)



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# Women's work

- A gendered space:
    - 'I just keep thinking this is about women's work; this is the work women have done over the centuries for nothing, invisibly' (female, 20 years in CSS)
    - 'It's hard to just keep doing something that clearly has no value. I can get more making a little widget in a factory somewhere, than for helping someone live the best life they can.' (female, 20 yrs in CSS)
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# Altruism

- Altruism

- 'we tend to sacrifice our interests for those of the clients' (female, 19 years in CSS)
  - 'There's nothing given back ... you have this sense that everything's been taken from you and you're meant to sacrifice (female, 19 years in CSS)
-



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# Vocationalism

- Vocation

- ‘we’re meant to see it as ‘doing god’s work’’  
(female, 19 years in CSS)
  
  - ‘there’s this idea that you do it because  
you’ve got a vocation.’ (female, 7 years in  
CSS)
-

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# Altruism, idealism and loyalty

- Lack of reciprocity
    - ‘loyalty is only one way and that is up; it doesn’t go down.’ (male, 15 years in CSS)
    - ‘they might have a really good kind of framework for ... how they work with clients but not at all how they work with their ... staff.’ (female 10 yrs in CSS)
    - ‘organisations that state these incredibly high altruistic values, need to take these same values and apply them to their staff.’ (male, 15 years in CSS)
-

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# What I found – Neo-liberalism

- What is neo-liberalism:
    - de-regulation,
    - marketisation of services,
    - introduction of contracting out
    - new partnership arrangements for delivery systems.
    - ‘the free market does it best’
  - From the mid 1980s
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# Neo-liberalism

- ‘The application of the economic liberal reform program to community services is seriously downgrading workers’ working conditions.’ (Bursian, 1995)
  - ‘the practice environment is chaotic, isolating, harsh and controlling’ (Wright, 2003)
-

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# Economic rationalism

- Quasi-market paradigm
    - quantity not quality
    - 'Community teams ten years ago used to be four staff, now we're down to one and the impact of that on health and safety and stress is just phenomenal' (female, 25 years CSS).
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# Economic rationalism

- An audit culture
    - The increased data collection and report requirements ... significantly increases occupational stress. (female, 12 years CSS)
-

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# Economic rationalism

- The cheapest tender
    - to deliver on the tender, they say ‘we can put you on four days a week. ... but we have to do deliver that [same] job in four days instead of five.’ (female, 10 years in CSS)
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# Consequences

- 'In many cases employees are asked to work overtime, take on larger case loads, without commensurate pay increases, in order for the organisation to continue to provide the services it is required to provide. The strain this puts on employees means that staff stress levels rise and subsequently the turnover is high.' (Allen Consulting Group, 2008)
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# New Managerialism

- 'a process through which competition and contractualisation are imposed onto the human services.' (Wright, 2003)
  - Increased accountability
  - Standardisation of social programmes
  - Focus on outputs
-

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# Managers

- Lack of sectoral knowledge
  - Lack of management experience
  - The meat in the sandwich
  - Bullying
  - Work Stress not understood as an OH&S issue
  - Reactive management
  - BoMs, CoMs and CEOs
-

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# The Fallout

- Funding shortages
  - Workloads
  - Deprofessionalisation
  - Skills issues
  - Supervision
  - High turnover
  - Stigma
-

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# The elephant in the room

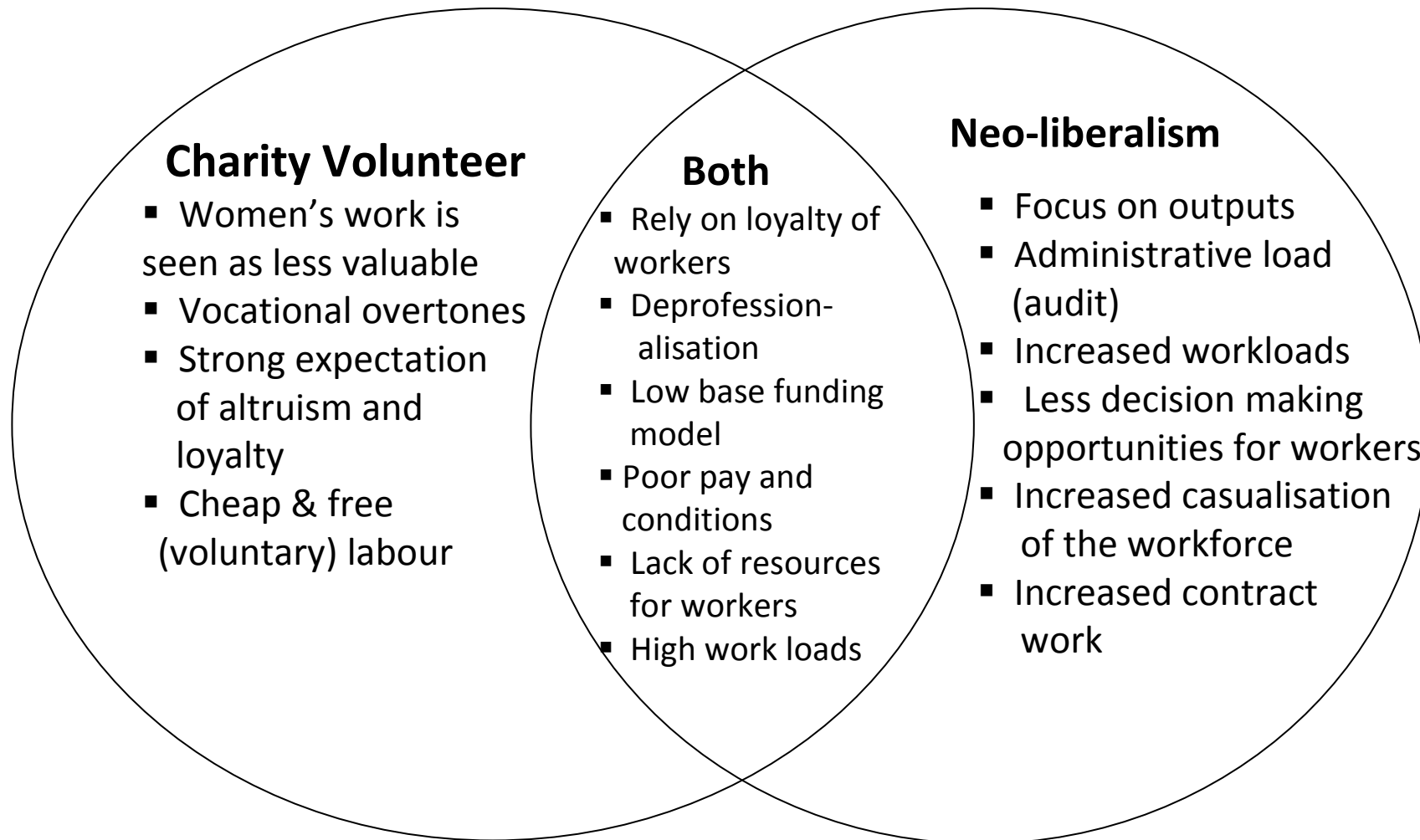
- Two colliding models
    - Charity volunteerism
    - Economic rationalism
-

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# The two models together

- Exploitative
  - Colluding
  - Contradictory
  - Colliding
  - Damaging
  - Unsustainable
-

## Overlay of Neo-liberalism on the original Charity / Volunteer model in the Community Services Sector



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## The CSS work culture ...

- ‘the culture we work in, we’re used until we’re burned out, then discarded and new ones are brought in.’ (female, 24 years in CSS)
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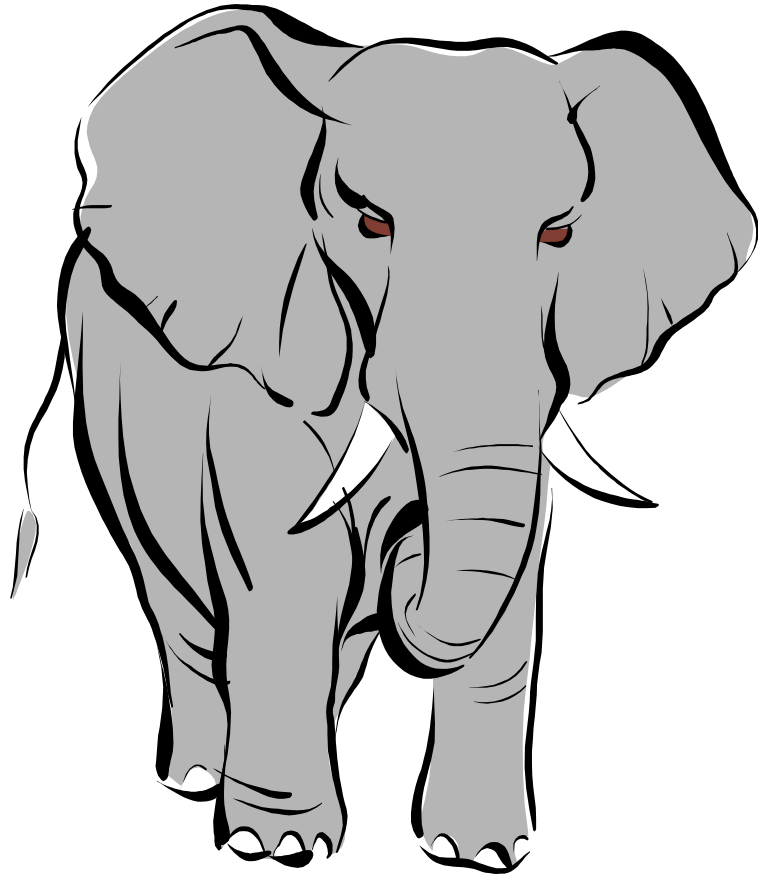
# What workers need

- Increased funding
  - Realistic workloads
  - Professional respect
  - Cultural change regarding stress
  - Adequate supervision
  - Time to debrief, reflect, heal
  - Appropriate responses to stress
  - Union strength
-



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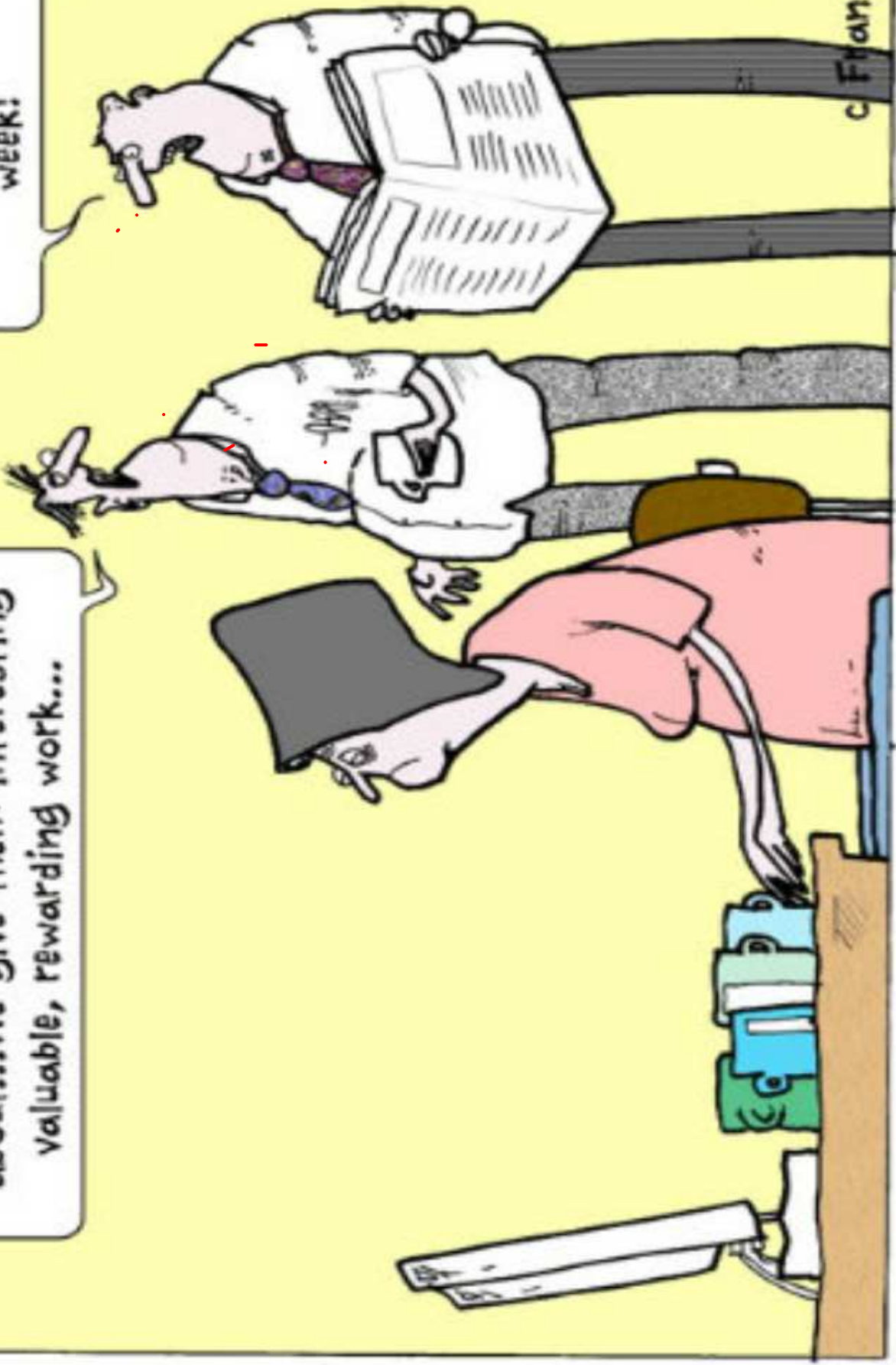
# Finally ...



- Address the elephant
  - Talk, talk, talk
  - Publicise my research
  - What else?
-

I don't know WHAT Social workers  
are ALWAYS complaining  
about...We give them interesting  
valuable, rewarding work...

AND we let them  
do it 80 hours a  
week!



c Fran