

INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 17 July 2017

Partially
Confidential

A Submission for the Parliamentary Inquiry into Discrimination and Harassment with Emergency Services NSW.

Opening Statement.

I worked in the Rural Fire Service for seven and a half years with three different managers, the latter two being the issue. I and other colleagues within my section were subject to harassment; sexually harassment; discrimination, age discrimination and blatant lying. I was at the time a volunteer with over twenty years' experience.

Content.

Manager two arrived sixteen months after I started. In hindsight, it was obvious that his intention was to empire build. To this end he used me, to engage with colleagues in ways to improve the section. This under the guise of being required for upper management which proved to be a lie, when upper management discovered the document. It was in fact a method of finding out who was complaining about issues within the section. He used this to try and divide the team. I confronted this with upper management and a meeting was called to discuss the issue. An email excuse was used and an apology was given, but no action was taken. However once caught the harassment started. He became clever in his abuse, by only phoning, an example of which is; He rang within two hours of going on leave, to say; "Upon your return I need to discuss your attitude." This is obviously is a form of intimidation.

I was excluded from a staff meeting on the pretext of being a volunteer, to have a "vol" overview. This seemed strange when there was at least one other volunteer within our group, and no input was asked for. I was however a foundation member of the Rural Fire Service Association.

An older staff member was made to sit outside his office so he could not interact with other sections.

A female colleague rang me in tears to say he had called her (over the phone) a terrier dog.

"You're nothing but a terrier dog, yapping at people heels"

This I immediately reported to new upper management, and again nothing was done.

I was told by him "to find a job you're happy with and don't waste people's time with getting you out."

I reported these issues to no fewer than two upper managers; an executive director and even a zone office manager to try and get something done. I was told to find myself a project, so they can't get rid of you. Once you are a 10/11 manager you are protected. (this referring to my manager)

Each section falls under an executive director, mine at that time is now the commissioner.

His reign continued for four years, with changes to upper management and higher management. During this time over 50% of the staff resigned. Unfortunately, an in house junior manager got his job and he was not interested in the mistakes of the past and the age discrimination (in particular) continued.

Eventually enough is enough and I put in a discrimination case against management, however the service conducts its own investigation. A section, which at the time; was called Investigations and Policy.

After some time I was told by management that there was no case to answer, as things were conducted correctly at that time and a report would be filed. How abuse is conducted correctly, is beyond reasonable thinking.

I requested that report on three separated occasions and to this day I have **never** seen it. I don't know if it ever existed; subsequently I resigned.

Another 20 % of my colleagues resigned in the following few years. A section that has over 80% of its staff leave and no one takes any action.

Summary

I found my ideal job or so I thought, only now I carry the scars of six years of mental torment. There is no mechanism in place for anyone that is subject to this environment. You are left to your thoughts and the only support is from other colleagues, which are suffering with you. A district staff member sent me this on resigning.

“Sorry to hear you are leaving, another of the good people gone. I will miss your input and advice. About time the service did a survey on why staff are leaving.”

This was sent to me nearly a decade ago.

I have seen and heard other accounts of harassment and discrimination. It was suggested to me on writing this, to state my thoughts in general terms; not to be too specific and as how they affect me. To this end I hope I have.

It is a disgrace when upper management won't deal with these issues and I doubt that higher management is even informed. There is a duty to all management to provide a safe workplace, free from harm. This did not happen.

One last item, I said at the onset that when it started work within the RFS I had over twenty years of voluntary service. I was recognised for this in the late twenty year time frame. However when I resigned from staff as well as a volunteer I had over thirty years. I now cannot be recognised for this as I am no longer a brigade member and the brigade can only recommend existing members.

More discrimination at the lowest level.

Solution

Any organisation can have these issues, it is human nature. How these are dealt with is another matter. I believe no organisation should self-investigate; this is leaving it wide open for protection of the organisation itself and is bias.

If a complaint is made, it should not stop at the next level of management. All upper managers should be informed. That way at least higher level management will know what is going on from the onset and maybe put a stop to it.

The Rural Fire Service structure is discriminatory. This is partly due to the funding arrangement where councils have to pay a proportion of funding. A small district office is expected to do the same work as those with more staff. Just because their council cannot afford to pay a greater contribution for additional staff, makes this discriminatory. This is very prevalent in the western areas of New South Wales.

While there is a structure from the volunteer ranks; to zone offices; regional offices and then to the myriad of departments within head office, there is unfortunately an "us and them" mentality. Volunteers give up a number of weekends to do training, only to find out that staff members have been "given the same" accreditation. What is good for one must be the same for all.

The purpose of this service is to provide fire protection in rural New South Wales; hence the term Rural Fire Service. This is undoubtedly done through education; hazard reduction and front line support. This support cannot be given if the wellbeing of staff AND volunteers is not adhered to.

I thank you for the opportunity you have given me to put these comments forward. I only hope that some good will come out of this. It is unfortunate that only this month I have heard or another staff member that has resigned due to harassment.

please suppress my name.