



# YMCA of Sydney

7th November 2011

Board Members  
YMCA of Sydney  
Via email

Dear Board Members,

**CONFIDENTIAL: Specialist Public Relations Crisis Management support required for impending Court Hearing on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

As previously mentioned, the recently established project team has been working on the ongoing response to the critical incident at Caringbah. Conversations now focus on mitigating the media risks associated with the impending Court Hearing on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> November.

Whilst we believe the Communication to this point has been well constructed and delivered, we understand the sheer degree of risk presented to the YMCA and seek the support of a Specialist Public Relations Consultant. The engagement of a PR Specialist will be initially to prepare for Thursday.

On Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November myself and Adam Blatch met with Mark Rix, Communications Manager of the Catholic Education Office (CEO) to discuss the ongoing proceedings. As you might be aware, Mark and the CEO have dealt with some significant issues which he walked us through as case studies. Mark provided a lot of advice and I have attempted to summarise it but I think there was a lot of valuable and timely information.

Mark indicated for us to expect the worst. In his experience, this is the worst possible situation for an organisation to deal with and we have a lot to consider and prepare for prior to Thursday, let alone the next 12-18 months. Expect every major TV station including Police, Court and Children's Affairs Reporters and Children's Affairs

We need to know as much as we can from the Joint Investigation Response Team before Thursday so we can prepare as much as possible. Liam is currently working with JIRT to understand as much as possible. Key questions to ask that will impact on the YMCA:

- It is going to open court?
  - Even if it not open court, Media interest will be HIGH and they will still investigate significantly
  - We can be guaranteed that the media will contest the suppression order
- Will the Person of Interest be present?
  - If he isn't, we should expect the absolute worst and heightened emotion
- Will there be additional charges laid?

The biggest decision we will need to make is who will be the spokesperson and will it be the same person for every situation? The specialist PR support will be able to provide the YMCA expertise to ensure the spokesperson is well scripted, trained and supported through the interviews to follow the court hearing. The spokesperson will need to be at court on Thursday and be prepared appropriately with body language, dressed to match the environment, using the right language and being somewhat in control of the interview.

Mark gave an example of the spokesperson the CEO used when they had a crisis at a school in Auburn. The school was rampaged by a number of men whilst children were present and there was fear in the parents at the time. During this instance, the advice from the PR specialist was that the head of the CEO was not the right spokesperson and instead they chose a senior staff member who was a tall, strong man and displaying strength. Mark was the second spokesperson (radio and paper) and between them they completed 23 interviews on the single day alone. They refused interviews on the 2nd day as they were very clear that they had said enough by that time

Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee the outcome on Thursday, nor the direction the Media will take. We can however, be as prepared as possible to ensure that the issue is shut down in the media as quickly as possible. Some other points that were made clear on Friday include:

- What other questions might be asked of the YMCA?
  - Did we know about it prior to it happening?
  - Did our staff have a feeling but didn't feel comfortable coming forward?
  - Did we provide opportunities for it to happen?
  - Should his Manager be sacked?
    - These are not my questions, these are just examples of what track a reporter might go down
    - Our preparation and training, that supported by a PR specialist will be critical

The 4 key pivotal steps we must take throughout the entire process are:

1. Never not tell people what they already know – we need to rebuild their trust
2. We must demonstrate our empathy and, to the best of our ability, remove our organisation/brand from the crisis – this is a very fine balance and specialist support critical
3. We need to separate the actions of the individual from our organisation - again, specialist support would be invaluable to ensure we subtly reinforce our values, use clear, consistent language with strong positional statements for the crisis.
4. Script every key message for with the following purposes:
  - Personal Message – with integrity
  - Company Message – reinforcing organisations mission
  - Incident Message – the facts

Some other key points from our meeting that stood out that we need to consider:

- Perception is the key at this point
- We have done a great job thus far but we need to not drop the ball and critically think out the next 6 days before next Thursday.
- It is an extremely emotional time - How people will judge us and how they will respond is unknown and we need to prepare for the worst.
- Who will be screening calls from Thursday? This could be supported by the Specialist
- Prepare for everything, and most importantly prepare your staff
- The critical support a PR Media Crisis Management group will provide is the specialist leadership to "shut down" the issue in the media as quick as possible
- As soon as we can, it is critical that we get back to normal – normality is the key – look at QANTAS.
- Are there any "back stories" that could come back to bite us? If the case drags out, could the media shift their interest to something else "YMCA" related?
- Invest in some Media Analysis – it will be invaluable for future learning

Kind regards,

James Ellender  
Marketing and Communications Manager  
YMCA of Sydney