

YMCA NSW Critical Incident Meeting 20 March 2013

Phillip Hare

Anne Mary Nolan

Kylie Pearson

Caringbah staff

CEO Phillip Hare introduced to Caringbah staff. PH was attending following the request from the previous meeting for staff to have the opportunity to put issues to Phillip and allow Phillip to respond.

A summary of the raised by Caringbah staff at the March 7 meeting along with the attending managers responses was read and discussion opened.

PH apologized to all Caringbah staff, he said that YMCA NSW had made a number of mistakes, one critical error was failing to engage the Caringbah staff directly in the response to the JL critical incident.

PH offered that there have been vital learnings from the incident and subsequent responses, specifically:

- YMCA NSW should have undertaken better communication in certain areas, particularly direct communication with the Caringbah staff
- Should have brought the staff together and engaged them in the response directly
- Management were operating very much in the dark, PH offered the example of having to previously deal with drownings and other serious critical incidents, however in comparison to these, the JL incident posed a far greater challenge and complexity.
- He and his management group were unprepared for the impact and now understand that they were operating from poor advice from the police, were dealing with very complex media related issues compounded by conflicting advice, and in conjunction with unprecedented pressure from parents. Throughout this they believed that staff were coping OK believing that they were getting good support from within the team. They now know this to clearly not be the case.
- PH said that they were told by police not to engage with staff or to provide group counseling to staff for fear of contaminating evidence. Police also advised them to not terminate JL for fear of alerting him to possible evidence.
- PH offered that without understating the impact for Caringbah staff, the incident has also had very high impact on the management team.
- PH advised staff that a formal analysis of all aspects of the incident will be conducted with a preliminary date set for late April. Caringbah staff will be invited to contribute to this analysis in conjunction with other personnel of YMCA NSW.
- Staff suggested that parents might also have important contribution to improved response management practices through their experiences in this incident. Parents could offer a unique perspective. Management acknowledged this as an important input to the any future strategy.

- Further consideration that parents could be invited to attend an information session to clarify facts and allow parents to share an accurate understanding of the circumstances, the role other staff have fulfilled throughout along with what YMCA NSW is now doing to understand how such an incident can occur, and what steps and resources can be applied to prevent any similar incident, or in the event of an incident, manage the process with the benefit of the learnings from this incident. Their engagement in this would be highly valuable.
- PH said that he had strong confidence that this analysis will guide a level of recovery for all personnel, lead to improved policies and practices for children's safety, and renewed confidence for all staff and management.
- PH stated that they want to understand – how does YMCA NSW learn to deal with the media, police, parents and staff without compromising the needs of any
- Staff said that they still don't know who the affected children are. They are still working with these children but are anxious about doing or saying the wrong thing. There was some discussion regarding the option of PH contacting the police and asking that they pass on to the affected families a written invitation from YMCA NSW to speak to PH in order to ensure that they are working to support the children and the parents in any ways possible. It is likely that the affected children are receiving counseling and it would be helpful if the YMCA based work and activities was supportive and consistent with counseling.
- PH acknowledged that a certain staff member had been particularly disengaged in the incident process. He apologized directly to this staff member and said that they should have sat down with her at the outset and explained their intentions to support her by shifting her and shield her from the many pressures they thought she would be confronted with, particularly from parents.
- PH said they should have built clearer supports around her
- The affected staff member offered that shifting from her role should have been her choice, she would probably have removed herself anyway, however the choice was taken away without proper explanation.
- Staff reiterated their discomfort with the continuing sense of suspicion from some parents that they may have been complicit in some way with the abuse. Staff felt that it would be helpful if PH wrote to all parents advising them of the review process and that the Caringbah staff were not complicit in JL' behavior, or contributed to the abuse.
- Staff offered that they were appreciative of PH attending and explaining things directly and that it had provided a better understanding of how things were constrained for YMCA NSW. Staff expressed empathy for the impact that the management team had also experienced.
- The management team assured that counseling or other support options remained open to all Caringbah staff, ongoing.
- Staff highlighted the impossible position they faced in trying to answer questions from anxious parents and school principals,
- Staff referred to having lost 5 children as a result of the incident, it might be of benefit to understand why the parents of those children withdrew their children from the programs.

- Staff asked if they could know more details about JL's offending behavior. PH advised that the court transcripts are public documents and that YMCA NSW has a copy.
- Management suggested that staff who were interested could attend a group facilitated session to review the transcript. This could look at the actual charges and what behavior these refer to along with the respective legal findings.
- This was seen as a good starting point for the CI analysis
- Management agreed to arrange for counselors to be available to support as necessary
- Also suggested that the male members of staff were feeling particularly uncomfortable simply through a gender implication. It was agreed that management would make specific approaches to Caringbah male staff and encourage them to attend this session. These staff might also be offered confidential external counseling or support.
- PH reassured staff that he remains available to any staff member who wishes to discuss any aspect of the incident further.
- PH explained that Catherine was dismissed as she had failed to make sufficient progress in the implementation of the safeguarding children program that she was recruited to. He explained that while Catherine demonstrated excellent counseling and support skills, YMCA NSW has set a priority to implement the SCP. Her role in the critical incident was seen as secondary to the role she was recruited to.
- Staff were acknowledged for their resolve to maintain their commitment to the work throughout these very difficult circumstances. This is further reinforced by their willingness to continue to look positively to a recovery for all, and improved practices.