



Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY



10 October, 2011

Principle Research Officer
Community Development and
Justice Standing Committee
Parliament House
Western Australian

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Inquiry into the recognition and adequacy of the responses by State Government agencies to experience of trauma by workers and volunteers arising from disasters

I am writing in response to your letter dated 12 September 2011, inviting Red Cross to make a submission addressing the Terms of Reference for the aforementioned inquiry.

Please find enclosed our submission addressing the terms of reference and additional points outlined in your letter. If you have any queries regarding the contents of the submission do not hesitate to contact Ruth Lane, State Manager Emergency Services.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide our input into this inquiry.

Yours Sincerely



Steve Joske, CSC
Executive Director

Red Cross Submission for the Inquiry into the recognition and adequacy of the responses by state Government agencies to experience of trauma by workers and volunteers arising from disasters

Red Cross Pre-planning and training undertaken with Red Cross staff and volunteers to deal with trauma before and after a disaster

- Under the Red Cross Workforce Engagement Plan all Red Cross staff and Emergency Services volunteers are required to undertake Personal Support training. Personal Support is the base line emergency services training package that is a pre-requisite for all Red Cross personnel deployed to respond to disasters. Amongst other things, this package provides personnel with an understanding of the psycho-social impacts of disaster. In addition, the package consists of a module focused upon self care and equipping personnel with the skills to identify signs of stress in themselves and others as well as measures to minimise and cope with stress in the field. It is a requirement that all personnel who continue involvement in emergency services work must refresh this training every three years.
- Red Cross delivers a number of other training packages focused on providing personnel with the skills required to deliver specific services provided by Red Cross under State Emergency Management arrangements. The delivery of these packages help to ensure personnel are skilled for the work they will undertake when deployed to the field during a disaster. Skilled and well prepared personnel are more likely to have the resources to cope with the impacts of trauma caused by disaster and to be in a position to provide peers.

Annual Budget spent on these pre-event activities

- Red Cross Emergency Services in WA currently has an annual budget of approximately \$20,000 to spend on training volunteers

Programs undertaken by Red Cross to assist staff and volunteers to deal with trauma during disaster

- Red Cross Emergency Services has a Fatigue Management guideline that is designed to set limits on the number of hours and days personnel may work during any given deployment, and the number of deployments personnel may participate in during any given season. This Guideline assists in minimising the build up of fatigue and over exposure to trauma in personnel as result of involvement in responding to disaster.
- Red Cross has a policy on time in lieu that applies to all Red Cross staff who are deployed to respond to disasters. This policy ensures that Red Cross staff that are deployed to respond to disasters are provided with adequate time off to compensate for deployment work conducted out of normal working hours. This policy assists in ensuring deployed staff are provided with adequate rest time before returning to a normal work routine.

- Red Cross utilises a systematic pre-deployment briefing system. This system utilises a consistent formula and aims to ensure that all personnel are equipped with relevant information about the disaster and their duties in the field thereby reducing the chances of stress brought about by uncertain and rapidly changing circumstances. The briefing system is also used to remind personnel of their own self-care placing an emphasis on recognising and responding to signs of stress in themselves and fellow team members
- Similarly Red Cross employs a post-deployment debriefing system. An integral part of this debriefing system is providing an opportunity for deployed personnel to talk about their experiences during deployment with colleagues and team mates
- Red Cross offers all personnel (volunteers and staff) access to a confidential Employee Assistance Program through PPC Worldwide both during and following deployment. This program provides confidential access to qualified psychologists.

Post Event Activities undertaken by Red Cross with staff and volunteers to deal with trauma arising from a disaster

- Red Cross runs group and individual post-deployment debriefing sessions following a disaster. Last season, Red Cross engaged a qualified psychologist through its EAP to undertake group debriefings of those who were deployed to respond to disasters. In addition to this Red Cross engaged a consultant to undertake one on one telephone debriefs with all Red Cross personnel deployed over the season. These one on one debriefing sessions provided personnel to raise concerns and reminded personnel of the availability of the EAP.

Potential barriers to those suffering from trauma accessing available assistance and services

- Red Cross have a number of volunteers who are WA State Government employees. As Red Cross is not recognised as an Emergency Services agency under clause 35 of the *Public Sector Award 1992* these volunteers must at present use their own personal or recreation leave in order to volunteer for Red Cross during a disaster. Lack of recognition of Red Cross as a designated Emergency Services Agency under the Public Sector Award 1992 is not conducive to ensuring these volunteers return to a work place that is supportive of their voluntary service in disaster response and may lead to these volunteers choosing to not to access available services in order to avoid a perception by their employers that they are 'not coping.'