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28th June 2012

Submission for House of Representatives Committee Inquiry into Workplace Bullying

Addressing:

- **Prevalence of Workplace Bullying in Australia**

I have been compelled to make this submission (even though revisiting the events described below is extremely distressing) because *I am particularly concerned with the prevalence and seriousness of the ramifications of bullying in regional areas and small towns/communities*. I believe these factors can turn a terrible and unpleasant workplace situation into an even worse social and public catastrophe with the abuse and its effects stretching beyond the workplace into the community for its victims.

In brief, in small towns/communities, everyone knows everyone else. Small towns/communities are, unfortunately, characterised by rumour-mongering. In small towns/communities outsiders (anyone who isn't generationally-attached to the area) can often be singled out for "special treatment", social ostracism and even abuse in public places. The "special treatment" seems in many cases to extend to anyone who does not conform to local attitudes (no matter how backward and ignorant), and even to anyone who doesn't conform to apparently trivial things such as a person's appearance or not conforming to standard local manner of dress!

In other words, the effect of workplace bullying in smaller communities extends beyond the walls of the workplace and permeates the community

itself, which is often made up of the very people who either perpetrate bullying or their passive supporters. If I can quote

who you will get to know as this document progresses) in an article in the local magazine "The greatest benefit of operating from is the *family* of staff, which has developed over a period of time. Currently we employ around 40 people - most of whom live in with their families" (My italics. I have attached a copy of this article, with the quotation hi-lighted).

I live 200m away from the door to the office I worked in at I

There are only approximately 2500 people living in the local government area of

In small towns/communities employment opportunities are far more limited than in larger centres and capital cities.

The suicide rate in rural Australia is already shamefully high. Workplace bullying, especially in smaller communities, must be considered a contributing factor in this and the generally higher incidence of mental health issues for those who don't live in big cities.

After I was obliged to leave the workplace due to the bullying and harassment, I got legal advice.

I had been told about the potential/inevitable stress any legal action would cause, and one psychologist, who had personally experienced workplace bullying herself, had recommended I just let it go. Nevertheless, I had made a personal resolution never to let anyone treat me like a doormat again after escaping a serious long-term domestic violence situation. I also wanted to change the fact that I had never stood up for myself, ever.

I was advised that there were three different legal avenues I could follow, each with different requirements in terms of evidence and proof and each had different time limits on putting them into action. I was told I had grounds to pursue my former employers under 1, Unfair dismissal; 2, the anti-bullying legislation as it stood at the time, and 3, Anti-discrimination legislation. The first option had a very short time limit, the second was still rather flimsy, so I went down the Anti-discrimination route - and was successful.

When this inquiry was announced, I was very glad. I felt this was an opportunity to tell the rest of the story. It was another chance for me to stand up for myself, for my ethics, and for others who may not have the strength or resources I have available, and who may be driven to desperate ends. I myself came very close to suicide on a number of occasions throughout this process, but I am blessed by being surrounded by loving and supportive friends and family, I have had the great fortune of meeting and building a network of excellent mental health professionals and counsellors. Others may not be as fortunate, and I fear for them greatly.

I sincerely hope this inquiry reveals the life-and-death seriousness of workplace bullying and that perpetrators are shamed and branded the dangerous criminal they are.

- **My Experience as a Victim of Workplace Bullying**

The workplace bullying at _____ began in the first couple of weeks after I started working there as a compositor in September 2008.

A little background to myself: I am by nature very shy, quiet and reserved. The word my friends and family use to describe me is "gentle". This is partly the personality I was born with, but I have also had a long history of depression and anxiety (affecting me to varying degrees throughout my adult life). I have been dealing with these issues, mostly successfully these days, through strategies I have developed with the help and support of psychologists, counsellors and GPs. These strategies include various CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) techniques and antidepressant medication. Lifeline has also been wonderful and a truly lifesaving service.

The ongoing problems with anxiety and depression has been found to be directly related to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), the legacy of a 13 year relationship with a physically, sexually and psychologically violent male partner. As a result, I suffer from social phobia, and am particularly wary of men (although this has improved out of sight since the events described here), which is really just an intensification of my natural shyness. To the point where up until the recent past, I was unable to leave the house on bad days. The PTSD also exhibits itself in flashback feelings of intense fear, especially in situations where there are raised voices or other aggressive behaviours.

Encountering the FIRST Workplace Bully at _____

I had only started there and held a lowly position in the organisation. About two weeks after starting, the CFO (Chief Financial Officer) _____, came over to my desk, leant over so her face was mere inches from my own, and asked "Do you have any friends?"- she didn't wait for an answer, she just immediately turned and walked away.

At the time I was rather shocked at the rudeness, but she was the boss.

It became clear that _____ was quite an aggressive individual, and very impolite and disrespectful of those working beneath her. This was the just the first of many like incidents.

In another incident, I wore a clip of coloured hair, like a streak in my hair. It's not too outrageous - in fact I wore the same accoutrement during my job interview where I got the position at _____ said "I like the colour in your hair. I couldn't get away with wearing something like that because it's unprofessional".

Yet another incident. _____ was having a meeting with someone from a government agency, and upon concluding she took him on a tour of the factory... starting with me. As usual, I was the only person working that afternoon in my section, as the others knocked off at an earlier time, and I had been concentrating on my work. When she brought the visitor over to show him where the production process began, I noticed he was someone I was acquainted with. He had been managing the local _____ when I had had some flyers to print for one of my art exhibitions. When he and _____ came over to my desk, he said he already knew me, asked me how I was going in a normal friendly way, and I responded in the same manner. _____ immediately cut me off, saying, "Right. Finished?" before leading the visitor onto the next part of the grand tour! I couldn't believe it. It seemed that I was not supposed to know this particular person!

After the first few weeks I was concerned enough to ask a lower level boss (who had hired me and who seemed a sympathetic listener) if _____ could fire me if she felt like it - he said, yes. I was also concerned enough to seek help from a psychologist, _____, in how to handle the stress the bullying was already causing, even at that early stage.

Although _____ was excellent, after several sessions, at \$200 a pop, I really couldn't afford this as an ongoing expense just to be able to cope at work. It also struck me as being somewhat unfair - almost like I was being penalised financially for the unnecessary bad behaviour of others in the workplace and the fact that it was not being dealt with by those with responsibility in positions of authority.

Encountering the SECOND Workplace Bully at _____

...

Although, at first, I felt I was getting along quite well with my co-workers, by February 2009, I was starting to be affected by unwanted attention of the bullying and intimidating kind from _____, who worked in customer service, but in the same office space.

This was in the form of rudeness, refusal to help with work or do anything I requested, staring, constantly walking past my desk and checking my work (in spite of my job being different to her own), sarcastic comments about my retro-style clothes ("Wouldn't it be terrible if we had to dress like _____!" she said, while she came to work with a split up the backside of her trousers several days in a row), about my level of education (I was studying at uni at the time, and according to _____ uni students were "stupid"),

and ridiculing the (Asian) food I ate and the music I listened to. A lot of it was extremely childish, and some of the language she used, such as "I'm dobbling on you!", I had not heard since primary school. She would use staff meetings to directly criticise others, often using vague expressions rather than a person's name, like "there's someone who *always* does that wrong" while staring directly at me (or whoever - *always* one of the three composers).

The most bizarre form of intimidation was a strange and almost laughable pantomime that would occur within half an hour of having any sort of disagreement with any other employee in the office. She would "creep" over to office in a really exaggerated way, knock on his door and say she needed to speak to him about something (while glaring at whoever - usually me - had annoyed her), then make a big show of lowering the blinds (still glaring at the unfortunate target of her wrath) and closing the door. The implication was that she was trying to get someone into trouble. This pantomime would happen every other day, sometimes more than once in a single day.

When I started working at and had returned from some sort of conference trip to Cairns. They were very intimate, and particularly from behaviour and language, I assumed that they were a couple. I don't know what the reality of the relationship was, but it definitely was not objective or purely professional.

On two occasions she accused other people of doing to her, not anything they actually did, but *what she did to them!* She accused of always staring at her - I'm afraid to say it was blatantly the other way around. Once I got upset because she told a similar lie about one of my fellow workers of whom I was quite fond. For weeks had been having daily arguments with, trying to get her to learn how to do a rather menial and boring task (we all had to learn how to do this - it was supposed to be a shared responsibility). simply refused, and it would often end with raised voices. One day, when was off sick, confronted about it. She acted all sad, saying "I've been trying to get to learn how to do this for weeks, but she just won't do it." I couldn't believe the blatant lie and it upset me because I saw it as stabbing the absent in the back. I had to leave the building for a while to calm down.

I am still at a complete loss as to why I decided to target me in the way she did.

I suspect that it was because of my shy and quiet demeanour, which seems to be interpreted by aggressive and bullying people as some sort of weakness - they see me as someone who won't stand up to them, and, up until this horrible experience at, they would have been completely correct. Bullies are always cowards. Raised voices, let alone regular yelling tantrums and arguments, absolutely terrify me. I experience intense physical fear reactions, including visible shaking. These reactions are deeply rooted in my PTSD. I discussed my concerns with and, explaining that I knew that my reserved and quiet personality seemed to attract bullies. At one point, actually told me to stop reacting to behaviour by shaking, but it

isn't something I can control. She described it was a "tell", a word I was not familiar with at the time - basically a give-away of my emotions.

CEO of _____, admitted in discussions with _____ of the Anti-Discrimination Board, that he had also noticed me shaking.

_____ also had a history of bullying other employees at _____. At least one other employee had left the organisation, before my time there, due to _____ behaviour. I was told, at various times, "That's just how _____ is" and "It's not bullying because she treats everyone that way".

The incident that got me worried enough to start watching my own back and keeping notes of my work days was a confrontation between _____

and one of the managers from the factory floor. _____ had made some minor mistake on the database. Instead of admitting to it and simply fixing it when it was pointed out to her, she started yelling at the poor guy saying "someone's gone in and changed the database!". Up until this point I had had no idea that anyone could go in and change the database, or why anyone would ever want to. The database could be tampered with, and I was later to learn that this was another avenue for _____ bullying to exploit.

A few months later, both myself and _____, had faulty jobs returned to us. They were very straightforward jobs, and nowhere in the documentation on the database were there any mistakes. That is until they were returned by the customer. They both had one digit in the dates incorrect. The last person to have access to the files in a state in which they could be altered had been _____. Whenever a fault came back to me, I would go through what had happened very carefully, in an attempt to learn and improve. There was no other explanation for these faults, which of course, made me (and, to a lesser extent, _____) look bad. I discussed it with _____, who also knew what had happened, because I thought it was quite serious. _____, whose position in the company was completely secure, seeing as she'd worked there for 16 or more years (virtually since the company had been set up), told me not to say anything, not to rock the boat. I also discussed it (without mentioning my theory or what _____ had said) and went through the file with another co-worker (_____), partly because I felt I must have missed something as I found it hard to believe even a bully would do something like that. _____ interrupted our discussion, saying "It must be a computer glitch. I'll go and talk to _____ [_____, the CEO, and never involved with the minor day-to-day jobs] about it later." Needless to say, she did not go to the CEO about the "glitch".

I have attached a copy of my work notes (which have been transcribed verbatim), with my various run-ins with _____, with dates and other details. I had prepared these notes basically as self-protection. Management knew - or at least _____ knew - that I had these notes. She was not interested.

The Effects of the Workplace Bullying at _____ :

Below is a "carbon copy" of my summary of the effects the bullying and discrimination I, experienced which led me to leave my job and the _____ workplace at the time I made my complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, about 12 months after my departure:

1. Financially I have suffered a severe setback. If it wasn't due to my (recently retired!) parents' willingness to take up my mortgage payments and rates, I would have lost my home. Although not my fault, this is a source of great shame for me, and has contributed to my depression and anxiety.
2. Although I worked hard and gave the organisation for over a year and a half of my life, I have no reference to show for it. Up until the last few meetings (about which this complaint is being made), *all* my regular performance reviews had been positive. This gives an unfavourable impression of my recent employment history to any employer I approach for a new job, especially in such a small regional centre. I suspect I am pretty much unemployable because of this and so have been (prematurely) obliged to try to support myself as a sole-trader (professional artist).
3. Undermined self-confidence resulting in depression, anxiety, panic attacks and avoidance of public places, which has also been detrimental in my search for further employment.
4. I am unable to leave my home and go into _____ (my home town) alone during daylight hours due to fear of potentially hostile or abusive encounters with _____ employees.
5. Severe setbacks in both mental and physical health: although I have been working hard to "hang in there", I have suffered from extended episodes of nausea and sleeplessness, depression and anxiety, and persistent thoughts of self-harm and suicide. I have lost weight. I have had to take care to maintain ongoing contact with counsellors and other mental health professionals, as well as Lifeline. This has also caused significant distress to my family and friends.

Although I live 200m from the door to the office in which I once worked, none of my personal effects were returned to me. These included photos of friends and family and postcards from the same, a pair of safety boots, a camera tripod as well as other less personally valuable items.

What kind of people would not return at least the photos and postcards which could easily fit in an envelope? Were they just thrown in the bin? Seems rather nasty to me.

Although I have no proof whatsoever, and perhaps I am drawing a long bow, I did experience something which worried me in applying for work after leaving

I applied for a job in (20km away) which involved graphic design and some scientific knowledge, areas in which I have some experience. I was interviewed by a woman whose surname was the same as one of the board members of the foundry - not a common sort of surname ().

She was very pleasant and the interview went ok, however in the end I did not get the job. This was perhaps because I wasn't the person they were looking for to fill the position, and perhaps my qualifications and experience weren't appropriate or up to scratch for the job. Nevertheless, considering the surname and the fact that is a relatively small regional centre, it did make me wonder. It also made me wary and discouraged and seriously doubt the possibility of ever getting decent employment in the area again.

Even now, more than 2 years after these events, I have experienced jeers from former workmates in public places (was the most recent one, who I had considered a friend, after all she'd visited my home for parties more than once and I had been to her place to have a party and meet her parents!). Otherwise I am pointedly ignored.

Several months ago I would not have been able to handle this proof that my reputation, at least in that organisation, has been denigrated. Now I see it more as a measure of those people's inadequacies and don't take it personally. In fact, these days it just makes me realise how lucky I was to escape as unscathed as I did - these people and that organisation did not deserve a second of my time nor an atom of my respect or friendship.

- **The role of workplace cultures in preventing and responding to bullying and workplace-based policies and procedures to influence the incidence and seriousness of workplace bullying**

I followed all appropriate and reasonable procedures in reporting my concerns about bullying. I reported it to all my "superiors" -

Nothing was done and my complaints were not taken seriously. I consistently reported instances of bullying, until it became clear nothing was going to be done about it - after that I only mentioned it if I was specifically asked about it.

I was told repeatedly to "just ignore it".

told me that there were lots of websites available that could give me advice about how to cope with bullying (!). She promised over and over to have my work station moved - this never happened. When I mentioned that I found it disturbing that seemed to walk by my desk, peering at what I was working on, an inexplicable number of times in a day, said I was imagining it. Over the next two days I kept a tally, to

get some sort of objective insight, with 2 columns - one column for each time walked close by my desk, a second column for everyone else in the office and from the downstairs factory floor (ie the other 30-odd people in the building). On both days, walked by my desk *twice as many times* as everyone else put together! I wasn't imagining it. once told me, after I had discussed the problem with her, to go home and have a scotch (!!!). In another such conversation she said not to worry about because "she's just a single mum who lives behind a pub in (now, I didn't particularly like , but I thought that someone in position, saying such a thing to me was well out of line).

It seems that if you are being bullied by one person and then, you get bullied by one of the bosses who is supposed to help protect workers from bullies, you have *no hope!* In fact, in her response to my complaint through the Anti-discrimination Board, claimed that I had never reported any bullying by to her!

When I returned from my enforced extended Christmas holiday (I had been asked to take extra time after the strange accusations), in the first week of January 2010, I found that an email had been sent out to everyone in the organisation on the day after I was asked to take early leave. It was an email asking for anyone who was interested to stand for an anti-bullying committee. By the time I got the email, it was way too late for me to apply. I replied anyway, expressing my interest in participating, and explaining the reasons for not knowing anything about it before then.

It seems strange, and perhaps merely coincidental, that this email about an anti-bullying committee was sent out the day after I - someone who had consistently complained about bullying, the only person complaining about bullying - was asked to take leave.

Failures in recruitment criteria at management/corporate levels:

I doubt it's possible to effectively screen people who are potential bullies - or even workplace psychopaths! - but it seems they are often repeat offenders.

In a conversation with , she told me about the first job she had after uni. She had been brought into a company which had a cultural problem, and she was hired to fix it. The "problem" apparently was one particular employee, an older woman, who had worked there for a many many years. described how the woman had been totally taken by surprise and could not come to terms with the fact she had been seen as the problem.

had been responsible for the woman losing her job, and, in own words, had "destroyed her [the "problem woman"] life".

Hearing this anecdote, and the casual, cold-blooded way told it, gave me goose-pimples.

Maybe the woman who had been instrumental in removing from her long-term job/career had been a problem, I don't know, but the

unsympathetic and almost boastful way
was disturbing.

described what she had done

Another conversation with
way.

was disturbing in another

She mentioned she was looking forward to her up-coming holiday to Tasmania. Just making small-talk, I said, thinking about the natural beauties of the Tasmanian wilderness I had enjoyed while hiking there, I said something along the lines of Tasmania being so beautiful.

She said she goes to Tasmania on holidays often. Then the tone changed abruptly as she continued: she was fascinated by . She was reading a book about him.

At this point, I didn't really want to continue with the conversation in the direction it was going. I had chills run up my back - sure, the pathology of mass murderers may be morbidly interesting, but it is not the sort of topic for light conversation. Also I find it disturbing how mass murderers and serial killers are given so much time in popular culture - it should be their victims and the lives they could have lived that should be the subject of books. That's just my personal opinion.

In fact I said something along those lines, but continued. She said the last time she had gone to Tasmania, she had visited Port Arthur. Then her expression and tone changed to puzzlement, as she said "It was really strange, when I asked people there about the massacre, no-one wanted to talk to me." She seemed genuinely surprised.

That was a pretty chilling conversation.

I don't know if these two anecdotes mean anything in the real world, and I am no psychologist. I just found them disturbing at the time, and in the context of what happened to me, they seem like giant warning signs that I missed. I do wonder if some sort of personality test or psychological screening could help in spotting people who are a little off-centre like this?

Failure of earlier "conflict resolution" of

bullying:

According to my supervisor in the compositing department at had gone to arbitration twice because she had bullied other, previous employees (who had subsequently left their jobs there). They'd left, the bully stayed! had held her position (with increasing authority over others in the workplace) for over 5 years.

In a meeting with , towards the end of the time I was there, I was warned about continuing to report incidences of bullying by

had, by this time, completely given up on management doing anything about my concerns. I had gone through all the proper channels. I had kept notes on my work and any incidents that worried me, but it had become apparent no-one was interested. was not even interested when

I said I had evidence of [redacted] ampering with my work, which had a direct implication for the company as the product had been rendered defective and returned by the customer! So, in spite of the on-going harassment and the increasing stress and health problems I was experiencing because of it, I had decided not to mention bullying unless I was specifically asked about it.

I was asked about it, and told it like it was.

She said that "another girl" had "caused problems" for the company in a similar situation in the past, which I took as a threat, and that I was supposed to keep my legitimate complaints to myself.

long-term problems of un-addressed bullying in the workplace:

Since leaving [redacted], I have heard numerous stories of the long-term (many years' worth) culture of bullying in that organisation. I know two individuals who left due to the bullying of one individual on the factory floor, a bloke by the name of [redacted] (I don't know his surname).

Later, I also heard that this same [redacted] had eventually lost his job at [redacted] for *threatening to kill* another employee!

I have heard that a woman was harassed off the factory floor. She went down the Anti-Discrimination route and was paid off.

The impression given by [redacted] reputation as an employer is that, over the years, they have held onto a policy of paying off problems like these, rather than addressing the internal toxicity within the organisation.

Response to my complaints in terms of addressing the failures of workplace culture:

During the "resolution" meeting for the claims under the Anti-Discrimination act, [redacted], CEO, said to [redacted] (Delegate of the President of the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW and Regional Manager based in Newcastle) that he was actually grateful to me for making the complaint as it had led to big improvements in the organisation of [redacted] in regards to such abusive behaviour. He acknowledged that there was a cultural problem in the organisation.

Of course, this was somewhat a hollow victory for me, as it did nothing to improve my situation. I had not stood up for myself to help those I consider the perpetrators out - I had done it so I could keep my self respect and to try to make it so no-one else would ever have to experience what I had gone through. I was concerned that others, without the amazing support structures I enjoyed, may not (literally) survive the ordeal. If it is true that their culture has changed, then it would definitely have been worth it.

Management's failure to set a good example:

The fact that the behaviour of people in managerial positions of authority (ie [redacted], CFO) was rude, aggressive and bullying, could not have created a very good role model for behaviour throughout all lower levels of the organisation. In fact, I believe, in this case, [redacted] ird's behaviour and attitudes *directly contributed* to the perpetuation of bullying and abuse against me in the workplace.

Company's failure to apply its own workplace rules regarding serious misconduct to perpetrators:

Although the Anti-discrimination Board of NSW found that [redacted], and by extension [redacted] were guilty of discrimination on grounds of perceived mental illness, and were obliged to provide compensation, an "expression of regret", and the work reference I was due, [redacted] was allowed to resign, rather than being immediately dismissed as she should have been, according to [redacted] own rules of employment. I have attached a copy of the relevant pages from the "New Employee Induction Documentation". I heard that she had resigned, telling other employees that it was either the job or her marriage. Although, [redacted] had perpetrated this serious discriminatory abuse, she was *allowed* to create a sympathetic cover story for her departure. As the victim of her abuse and having been put through terrible psychological, physical health and financial difficulties, I was never given the opportunity to defend myself or have my name cleared.

As part of my demands for reparation in regards to the injury caused by the workplace abuse, I had asked for a statement to be made publicly throughout the company about what had happened in order to exonerate me and hopefully protect me from further repercussions of the events- a demand that was not considered important by [redacted] and its CEO

Under the terms of the outcome of the Anti-discrimination Board, it was to be kept confidential. Although I would have loved to scream it out from the rooftops, legally I am not allowed to discuss the events, the complaint or the outcome.

My reputation was sacrificed, the perpetrator's reputation salvaged!

I was denied natural justice.

If proper and fair procedures had been followed, the whole thing could have been cleared up on the day it supposedly occurred!

I would also like to point out that there were actually two instances where I found myself totally devastated.

The first was the incidents that directly preceded my departure ([redacted] making up a psychological diagnosis of me being "dangerous and potentially violent" and claiming it was from a qualified psychologist; not being able to tell me what I was accused of "If you don't know, then there's

something seriously wrong with you!" etc - all of which is at the end of the attached notes from my work).

The second came a year and a half AFTER I had escaped, at the time I received response to my complaint through the Anti-discrimination Board. In many ways this was worse.

I finally discovered what I had been accused of doing - and found that besides not having had anything to do with any of it, it seemed that there was more than one individual involved in what amounted to a "set-up".

A page of doodles had been detached from a stapled pile which had itself been somewhat buried in a pile of paper I used for re-use (using the unprinted sides for notes). The cartoon doodles had been "enhanced" by the addition of a row of bullets by an unknown hand (not my own - I spotted them because I am an artist and even in my cartoon doodles I keep things at least in the same scale!), giving the whole thing a slightly sinister edge. Then the pilfered, enhanced and detached sheet was left on the seat I had occupied during a meeting in the meeting room for a third party () to find. I knew nothing of all this, and refused to tell me what I was supposed to have done at the time - she just accused me of being a dangerous psycho. At the time I was freaked out by how could have possibly got this sheet of doodles without going through my personal effects on my desk, which is where I had last seen it.

It was evident from the response to my complaint that my name and character had been dragged through the proverbial mud - had conducted interviews with all my work colleagues about me. had claimed in these interviews that she feared for the safety of her family (!).

It was distressing to me that anyone who had known me for more than 5 minutes could think I was capable of what I was accused of. Partly its disturbing that anyone could have so low opinion of me to think me capable of such childish behaviour. Much much more upsetting, I have never been violent in my life, on the contrary, I have been the victim of violence over a long period. I had *confided* this fact, in , in a last ditch effort to explain the distress bullying was causing me.

The whole thing was too much. I did my best to hang in there for a few months but I ended up in hospital - at the Centre, a psych wing attached to Armidale Hospital for just over 3 weeks, on suicide watch. It took another 6 months after this for me to get back to any real semblance of health.

- **Are there regulatory/administrative or cross-jurisdictional... gaps that should be addressed in the interests of enhancing protection against and providing an early response to workplace bullying, including through appropriate complaint mechanisms?**

Industry Australia:

Early in 2009, we had a visit from a representative of Industry Australia. The whole workforce was present and we spent half a day listening to how bad bullying and other forms of harassment in the workplace can be.

Several months later, when the bullying was stressing me to my limits, I contacted Industry Australia to get advice. At the time, I was not aware of my rights, in terms of protection from bullying, or the various avenues and government institutions I could pursue for support and information. The only information I had had come from this presentation organised by

When I contacted Industry Australia, I was told that they were an organisation which only dealt with employers, not employees. It was a dead end - they didn't give me any information to refer me in the right direction (not that they had to). This was shattering because, not knowing my rights and that there were indeed many other organisations who could have given me advice, I felt there was no hope for my situation. It was actually quite a blow and quite depressing. I felt totally vulnerable.

- **Most appropriate ways of ensuring bullying culture and behaviours are not transported from one workplace to another**

A person who has been found to have persecuted a fellow employee, should have this mandatorily recorded on some sort of permanent record, similar to a criminal record, so that there is some warning for future workplaces this person may infect, and also as a deterrent. Some sort of compulsory disclosure. Perhaps some sort of database potential future employers could check before employing such problems into their own workplaces.

These people are toxic and dangerous, but bullies are also cowards. They will crumble, and perhaps rethink their behaviours, before someone in authority standing up to them.