

Bullying in the Workplace

FE.

was just 16 and 9 months when he started an apprenticeship as a chef at the local hospital

Two apprentices began at the same time. They were employed through a training group ; they were to have on the job training with occasional supervision from TAFE.

Bullying began almost immediately, put downs, jokes at his expense, sexual innuendo, tampering with his belongings, he was ridiculed and humiliated. He was not shown how to do his work sheets and then asked to complete tests.

did not report what was happening to us although he did tell us some things. At first when we listened to his complaints we said to him that it is a lot different from school and that you have to begin at the bottom rung of the ladder and work your way up. He told us less and less until we eventually thought things had sorted themselves out.

During this time behaviour changed. At first we put this down to early morning starts, changes from his school life to that of the workplace and adjusting to those changes. He became angry and reactive; he had started to withdraw from his friends and was moody and difficult to live with.

Things became worse, he began to linger when it was time to go to work and struggled each day to get himself to work. This was a stark contrast to the beginning when he rode his bike at 6 am and arrived 20 minutes early.

Unbeknown to us he had started to use cannabis, to cope with his problems. After almost two years the other apprentice spoke up about what had been going on, She admitted that "what happened to was 10 times worse than what happened to her".

By this stage we were worried about health and mental wellbeing. He did not tell us what had been happening until we let him know what we had heard from the other apprentice.

had begun to feel that he was to blame for what had happened his self esteem was low, he said that he must be weak to not be able to put up with it like all the other had.

The workplace consisted of a kitchen manager who worked mainly in the office, the supervisor/trainer who was the bully, chefs and kitchen hands. The workplace culture was ingrained; there were many long serving staff whose attitude was t had happened to them so put up with it. Most staff turned a blind eye or laughed along with the taunting.

After we found out what had been happening we made an appt with CVGT to report the bullying. Statements were made by both apprentices and another staff member who admitted to being bullied. Although both the other apprentice and that worker withdrew their complaint. One was given a payment with a confidentiality clause and the other was transferred aw y form the bully.

All staff had been asked to sign confidentiality statements so as not to discuss case. There was a climate of fear and intimidation in the kitchen to remain silent about the bullying.

It was months after the first report and things were still not settled. The union had become involved on behalf of the bully who stalled things.

had deteriorated. He was diagnosed with PTSD Depression and Anxiety. His use of cannabis was hindering his improvement. He was admitted to hospital on 4 occasions relating to his mental health and cannabis use. The workplace had internally investigated and substantiated the claims of bullying but because of inability to return to work, and his hospitalisation it seemed that nothing would be done. I contacted them the Equal Opportunities Commission who held a hearing and was awarded an amount of money and was asked to sign a confidentiality clause. There was no apology.

felt that he had been paid to shut up, this impacted on his health and he withdrew even more. He often said "they believe me but I'm not worth it"

The accused was eventually given a package of significantly more than shut up money. felt that had been rewarded for what he had done to . Again significantly affecting health.

remained on a doctor's certificate on workcover attempting work in several places but struggling with his mental health at all times.

During the two years of this investigation and ongoing drama our two daughters watched their brother change.

Unbeknown to us had confided in his youngest sister the extent of the bullying and sexual abuse he had suffered.

When worksafe finally did an investigation our youngest daughter believed that the abuse would be reported in the local paper. She was fearful of reaction due to the extent of the abuse he suffered.

took her life the week after worksafe had rang and told us they had finished their investigation and would let us know within the next few weeks if they had enough evidence to take it to court.

blamed himself for his sister's death and he too ended his life just one month later.

Our lives had revolved around trying to get help and justice for I dropped my nursing shifts from 9 per fortnight to 5. I have now resigned. We now care for our 10 year old granddaughter (daughter) the effects of bullying on our family are many and long term.

Addressing the Terms of Reference.

Things that may have helped.

If the investigation had been completed independently and in a much more timely manner.

An apology and cessation of the behaviour early in the process

Holistic medical and mental health approach.

Better communication between health practitioners

Better understanding of the effects of bullying in the workplace.

Better education of bullying and its effects

Things that made it worse

Workplace culture

Lack of education

Fear of retaliation and fear of job loss if people spoke up

Staff lack of empathy

cannabis use

Time between reporting and end of investigation

No real finalisation or Validation

Union involvement.

Lack of communication between systems eg. Workplace worksafe EOC etc
being treated as a mental health issues rather that a workplace injury