



Mr Mark Roberts
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition St
MELBOURNE

March 28, 2013

Dear Mr Roberts

RE Investigation into the death of Rebecca Lazarus (COR 2007 002529)

I write in response to the Coroner's recommendation to Women with Disabilities Victoria:

To continue to develop the skill and knowledge of staff and proprietors of supported residential services, and enhance the support provided to residents of these services, I recommend that the Department of Health, in consultation with the Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Vic) and Women with Disabilities Victoria, incorporate a family violence training module into the current supported residential service training schedule. This should involve a specific focus on the impact and effects of family violence in relation to people with disabilities. Development and delivery of this training should occur in consultation with these specialist family violence and disability organisations.

I wish to advise that Women with Disabilities Victoria is strongly supportive of the Coroner's recommendation to improve SRS proprietors and staff's knowledge of violence against people with disabilities, in particular family violence. To this end Women with Disabilities Victoria has met with Department of Health and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria to discuss ways to implement the Coroner's recommendation.

To date Women with Disabilities Victoria has

1. met with the Department of Health and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) on 18th December 2012 to establish appropriate process for implementation of the Coroner's recommendation.
2. Collaborated with DVRCV to provide resources for Department of Health to distribute to SRS proprietors and Authorising Officers.
3. Liaised with Department of Health regarding a follow up meeting to continue to implement agreements reached at the meeting of December 18th.

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Further detail of these processes is outlined below:

1. Meeting of the Department of Health (DH), Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) and Women with Disabilities Victoria.

At the meeting it was established that new and existing legislation requires

- SRS to have minimum standards to meet needs of residents including a standard on protection from abuse which has an outcome that 'residents live in an environment free of verbal, emotional, sexual or physical abuse, harassment, exploitation or neglect'.
- Proprietors are expected to ensure staff are adequately trained to meet the needs of residents and comply with legislation. DH is currently reviewing the training program provided.
- Proprietors are required to report serious incidents to the department including alleged serious assault (sexual or physical) to DH Authorised Officers (AOs). Proprietors are responsible for ensuring the victim of assault is safe and appropriate referrals are undertaken, AOs are responsible for ensuring proprietors fulfill their legislative obligations.
- Proprietors are required to keep written records of incidents.
- Proprietors are required to have a complaints system in place.
- Personal Support Co-ordinators are required to do 40 hours of training over three years.

Further it was established that

- a guideline has been developed in October 2012 in conjunction with CASA forum on '*Responding to allegations of sexual assault in SRS: clarifying the roles of SRS proprietors, the Department of Health and Centres against Sexual assault*'. CASAs are currently involved in providing training on sexual assault.
- A Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) for identification and response to family violence has been developed by the Department of Human Services and a training program for the CRAF is currently delivered by DVRCV. Training provided to SRS staff could be in line with the CRAF guideline and training.

The following actions were agreed to support the Coroner's recommendation:

- Department of Health will identify responding to victims of violence as a priority for training of proprietors and SRS staff.
- A reference group of proprietors and local family violence services will be engaged in developing the program.
- DVRCV will play a lead role in assisting in the development of the course. Women with Disabilities Victoria will provide advice in the development of the course. It was agreed that this should involve an intense course with

follow up support and training to integrate knowledge of how to respond to family violence into routine practice.

- DHS family violence program will be consulted to ensure the program integrates with the Family Violence Common Risk Assessment Training Program.
- Involvement with local family violence services could be encouraged through a guideline similar to the Guideline on responding to sexual assault .
- Agreements with pension level SRS could incorporate a requirement for proprietors and Support Co-ordinators to undertake family violence response training.
- A newsletter to proprietors will promote the proposed course.
- Family violence training should also be provided to Authorised Officers and community visitors
- Family violence education should be made available to residents. A further meeting will be held to discuss how this might be achieved.
- Further discussion regarding who should provide training to SRS proprietors and AO's.

2. Resources supplied to Department of Health to distribute to SRS proprietors and Authorising Officers.

DVRCV developed information on family violence, identifying when violence is occurring and how to respond when family violence is suspected.

3. Liaison with Department of Health regarding a follow up meeting

A further meeting is being planned to support the implementation of family violence training and to discuss how to educate residents of SRS on family violence response.

If you have any further queries regarding this letter I am happy to be contacted.

Sincerely



Keran Howe
Executive Director