



MEDIA RELEASE

4 March 2014

The Salvation Army responds to Dateline allegations

The Salvation Army does not take lightly the serious allegations made in the SBS Dateline episode aired on 4 March 2014.

This is compounded by the fact that the allegations are very general in scope and time, lack any specific particularisation and do not allow The Salvation Army an appropriate opportunity (because of both the lack of particularisation of the allegations and the very limited turnaround time provided) to adequately investigate and respond.

Under these circumstances, The Salvation Army was unable to agree to a request for an interview at this time.

However, set out below are the responses The Salvation Army was best able to provide in relation to the allegations regarding the recruitment, training and support of staff, noting the limited detail and lack of particularisation.

1) The Salvation Army recruited as support workers people with inadequate skills and experience

This allegation is denied. By their very description, support worker roles typically do not require individuals to have particular skills or experience. Support workers fulfil unskilled duties in support of the provision of basic needs for transferees. The Salvation Army maintains that those staff who were engaged in this role were, at all times, adequate to discharge the duties required.

We asked Dateline to provide us with full details as to which support workers are alleged to have had inadequate skills and experience, at what point in time, and which skills and experience are said to have been lacking, so that we could investigate and respond accordingly. No such response was received.

Recruitment

The allegation that young staff were engaged without interviews or discussion of their skills and experience is denied.

It is unclear what is alleged or insinuated by the term 'young staff' - at all times staff were engaged in capacities in which they were able to discharge their required duties. The role of Support Worker (which the Dateline allegation initially referred to) was a very flexible role, which at times consisted of largely unskilled activities, such as sport and recreation activities, facilitating computer and telephone access, and operating the kiosks.

In the earliest stages of recruitment for work on Nauru and Manus Island in 2012, whilst an online application process was used as the first stage of applications, this was followed by a telephone interview. Staff were also required to undertake a formal induction process at the commencement of their employment.

In the early days of The Salvation Army's work on Nauru and Manus Island, prior to the formalisation of the contract, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection required an incredibly rapid start-up, which meant that a formal induction was not developed prior to The Salvation Army getting its first people on the ground. However, at all times (including from the first deployment) staff were briefed by The Salvation Army either prior to departure or immediately upon arrival at the Offshore Processing Centre.

2) The Salvation Army failed to deliver to its staff sufficient training and support to fulfil their roles

This allegation is denied. The Salvation Army has received no evidence from staff or from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (through any of its quality control mechanisms) to support this allegation.

The allegation does not provide any particularisation of the role/s referred to, which Island the allegation is apparently relevant to, the period of time applicable to the allegation, and the specific criticism as to how and to what extent the failure is said to have occurred. The allegation is without any substance or credibility and

The Salvation Army is prevented from having procedural fairness to respond any more fully than above. We have offered to investigate this allegation further if specific particulars are provided by Dateline. To date, no such particulars have been provided which enable us to understand what is the actual alleged failure.

Training

The allegation that staff were required to undertake face to face work with asylum seekers without documented guidelines or training is noted.

The incredibly fast paced start up required of The Salvation Army meant that in the early days the Department was still formalising its own processes and requirements at the Centres, which were needed to adequately inform Salvation Army practices. Once properly established on the islands, The Salvation Army's staff were receiving detailed position descriptions and specific support regarding the requirements and expectations of their roles. At all times, staff were fully supported by a comprehensive Employee Assistance Program provided on-island by an external clinical psychology firm, in addition to Salvation Army supports and debriefing.

3) Salvation Army management told caseworkers to create Individual Management Plans for asylum seekers without having met with the individuals concerned

This allegation is denied. At no time have Salvation Army management instructed caseworkers to the effect stated above. IMPs were regularly audited by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. The Salvation Army was at all relevant times subject to a robust performance management framework which called for high quality IMP production. Salvation Army policies and procedures are in stark contrast to this unparticularised and incredibly serious allegation.

The Salvation Army again asserts if Dateline has a proper allegation (supported by particulars as to who is said to have given such instructions, where, to whom, when and details of the substance of the alleged instructions), then those details should be put in the appropriate form. Dateline has again failed to provide such particulars to afford The Salvation Army procedural fairness in investigating and addressing this allegation.

4) The Salvation Army management expected or encouraged caseworkers to copy and paste generic information between Individual Management Plans in order to appear as though the Salvation Army was meeting its performance targets

This allegation is denied. Again, Salvation Army management has never expected or encouraged caseworkers to undertake the course of conduct alleged above. Despite our requests, Dateline has again failed to provide sufficient particulars to afford The Salvation Army procedural fairness in investigating and addressing this allegation.

5) The Salvation Army was unable to deliver adequate welfare services because security and immigration officials overruled it

This allegation is denied. The Salvation Army confidently believes that it delivered welfare services to transferees to a high standard of care. Complimentary feedback was constantly received from the transferees and from relevant inter-agency and governmental officials. The Salvation Army offered to further investigate this if Dateline could provide further details, including specifically which welfare services, which security officials, which immigration officials, which country the 'overruling' occurred in, which time period, and what is suggested by the term 'unable to deliver adequate welfare services'. Dateline has failed to provide any of the requested information and without those details, The Salvation Army has no means of investigating or responding.

6) The Salvation Army threatened its staff that if they speak to the media or other organisations about what happened in the offshore processing system, they would be pursued legally

All staff working in the OPCs – Salvation Army employees or otherwise – are required by the Department of Border Protection and Immigration to sign Deeds of Confidentiality.

These Deeds are entered into between the Commonwealth of Australia and the individual employee only. The Salvation Army is not a party to these Deeds and cannot, as a matter of law, enforce compliance with them.

The Salvation Army is required to remind staff that the Deeds are in effect perpetually, and do not cease on end of employment.

With respect to the specific allegation that The Salvation Army has threatened its staff, again, this allegation was unfairly put and The Salvation Army cannot respond in any meaningful way until The Salvation Army knows what the allegation actually is - specifically, which staff member/s are alleged to have been threatened, how, by whom, when, and under what circumstances / in what form. Despite requests, Dateline has failed to provide any of this information.

Experience

Ultimately, The Salvation Army confidently believes that its service on Nauru and Manus Island was a positive experience for those transferees who were in its care throughout the time it served. The results of The Salvation Army's work are borne out by the engagement of the transferees with the services provided by The Salvation Army as welfare service provider.

Today, The Salvation Army continues to care for the transferees in ways other than its capacity as a contracted service provider, including through prayer, governmental advocacy, provision of gifts, correspondence and other support which it provides to the persons in need.

ENDS

For further information or media enquiries please contact:

Joseph Younes, The Salvation Army Humanitarian Mission Services – 0427 509 028

The Salvation Army Media Office – (02) 9266 9820 (diverts after hours)