

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

POLICY STATEMENT NO. 42

STAFF COUNSELLING

JANUARY 1992

GENERAL

This policy refers to a program of counselling for CALM employees. Whilst the type of assistance planned is not new, staff counselling should acquire a sharper focus and more emphasis as a formal program.

1. OBJECTIVES

- To provide an additional form of assistance to employees suffering from stress and other problems caused by their work or affecting their work. Employees must feel safe to use the service and not fear repercussions as the result of having done so. Confidentiality is a key element.
- To offer a point of contact for managers and supervisors wishing to discuss their concerns about employees whose problems are affecting their work performance.
- To be a source of information and assistance to senior management regarding staff issues such as morale and absenteeism.
- To organise or contribute to educational programs for staff on personal topics such as stress management, retirement, self development and interpersonal skills.

2. BACKGROUND

Organisations are recognising the possible effects of personal problems within the workplace and the value of providing assistance to employees experiencing such problems.

Even a small number of workers whose worries or behaviour are affecting their work - through absenteeism, lateness, accidents, low morale, conflict with other employees - cost an organisation through reduced efficiency and productivity.

There is also value in reducing stresses and anxieties of employees simply for the benefit of themselves and their families. In much the same way, safety programs are designed to save human suffering and hardship as well as reduce costs.

Many personal problems affecting employees and their work are resolved informally, often with the help of a fellow worker or the supervisor. At times, however, it is appropriate to seek the advice and counsel of people trained in dealing with such problems.

Employee counselling programs provide a contact point for staff seeking help with their problems. The type of assistance given may be information, advice or professional counselling, either in-house or via an external agency.

Such programs are also used as vehicles for addressing employee performance problems. The manager or supervisor may suggest counselling to the particular employee or even initiate a referral. The need for the employee to receive the assistance voluntarily, however, limits the extent to which counselling can be used effectively for this purpose.

It cannot be demonstrated at this stage that counselling programs are cost effective. To a degree it can be reasoned they contribute to increased productivity and with greater confidence that they promote staff well-being.

3. POLICIES

The Department will:

- 3.1 Provide access to professional assistance for employees by appointing a Departmental Counsellor.
- 3.2 Encourage employees who are facing problems or difficulties to seek advice and counselling.
- 3.3 Ensure that information obtained concerning such employees is treated confidentially.
- 3.4 Undertake that an employee's decision to seek counselling will not jeopardise the job security, promotional opportunities, leave or other entitlements of the employee.
- 3.5 Encourage managers and supervisors to use the counselling program by making contact with it when they become aware of a situation where this might help.
- 3.6 Support employees seeking counselling by assisting them in respect to telephone calls, travel costs and time off work according to established guidelines. The costs of counselling by outside agencies to whom employees are referred to be met by the employee.

4. STRATEGIES

- 4.1 Recognise the importance of on-the-job support already being given to employees with problems by fellow workers, managers, supervisors and similar trusted contacts.
- 4.2 Develop a counselling program to supplement the existing support network which will be available to country and metropolitan employees. Establish procedures and provide information to managers and supervisors regarding the program.
- 4.3 Develop a case-management model which offers assessment and either in-house counselling or referral to an outside agency, whichever is more appropriate.
- 4.4 According to the needs and wishes of the individual concerned, arrange referrals to specific community-based organisations. A counselling arrangement for CALM staff has already been established with one Perth based agency, the Inter-Church Trade and Industry Mission Inc. (ITIM) which operates an industrial chaplaincy service.
- 4.5 Provide information regarding the counselling program to all employees, this to be reinforced by periodical publicity.
- 4.6 Establish a register of community agencies in both country and metropolitan areas to which employees may be referred. Develop further links with these agencies and with other employee-counselling services within the State.

4.7 Monitor and evaluate the program (within the limits of confidentiality).

Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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