



Royal Commission
into Family Violence

WITNESS STATEMENT OF KATHERINE LOUISE PAROZ

I, Katherine Louise Paroz, Human Resources Advisor, of 242 Exhibition Street in the State of Victoria, say as follows:

1. I am authorised by Telstra to make this statement on its behalf.
2. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

Current role

3. I am the Chief Talent Officer in the human resources department at Telstra. In this role I oversee talent, performance, leadership development as well as diversity and inclusion. Part of this role is to consider how Telstra can leverage its strengths to support diverse and inclusive practises.

Background

4. In 1994, I began work at Telstra as a graduate in human resources.
5. Subsequent to my graduate year, I worked in a variety of customer service and business roles, such as managing call centres.
6. In 2004, I returned to human resources and have undertaken various roles in that function, including leading HR for large business units which managed the employment needs and welfare of approximately 20,000 Telstra staff.
7. The role of Chief Talent Officer was created in 2013, and I was appointed into it at that time.

Qualifications

8. In 1994 I obtained a degree in Economics from Monash University.

Family Violence and the workplace

9. As one of the nation's largest private employers, Telstra employ about 33,000 people. The figure most widely circulated about family violence is that one in three Australian women experience physical violence by their partner. These figures

suggest that there is a high probability that a number of Telstra employees will be affected by family violence.

10. It is uncontroversial that family violence affects people's ability to work, and often leads to absenteeism. Ultimately some employees choose to leave their workplaces entirely as they have no further leave they can take, and are too embarrassed to name the reason they require time off.
11. We thought it likely that individuals affected by family violence were exhausting their sick leave, annual leave and unpaid leave as a result of their personal circumstances. Although it is difficult for us to prove, we also thought it possible that we would have a number of people who were abandoning their employment every year due to family violence.

Family and Domestic Violence Support Policy

12. Telstra has a long term relationship with White Ribbon and we are an accredited White Ribbon workplace. We approached White Ribbon to advise us on what else we could do as a workplace to assist with the issues associated with family and domestic violence.
13. White Ribbon advised us that we should name family violence as a reason some people were using up their leave to deal with these issues or, in some cases, give up their employment altogether. We identified that there was not a framework or a mechanism for them to express that they required assistance.

Creating a framework

14. Telstra's human resources team drafted a framework for the family violence leave entitlements. Although it was not required, a business model was created and approved by the CEO. Intuitively, the business understood that people affected by family violence were taking leave anyway. If the leave is already being taken, we were simply recognising an issue that likely affects a number of employees.
15. The family violence leave entitlement affords each permanent employee up to 10 days' paid leave per annum and up to 10 days' unpaid leave for casual employees for the purpose of dealing with family violence related matters. Management have the discretion to provide more leave if required.
16. The leave first became available in November 2014 and was introduced through the internal communications system to all staff. Learning courses were provided to all employees to educate staff on issues associated with family violence, and avenues they can use to access support services and counselling.

17. Our management was also provided with a discrete but active education campaign on how to deal with employees who requested the family violence leave. The education and training included how to refer the employee to further support services or independent external counselling.
18. An employee can claim family violence leave by speaking to their manager in the same way they would apply for annual leave. Once the approval is granted, the employee can then apply for the leave online and not through central payroll. The only person who knows about the leave is the employee's manager, as the leave is not visible to other employees.
19. Management are empowered to make the decision to grant family violence leave without being required to ask the employee for proof.
20. We consulted with White Ribbon and Women's Services Network (**WESNET**) about what to call the leave, and whether it should be a generic 'personal leave' category so the issue of family violence didn't have to be labelled. White Ribbon and WESNET advised us that we should address the issue and name the leave what it was as part of the Family and Domestic Violence Support Policy.
21. There was some resistance to the introduction of family violence leave from a small group of staff who thought that it was unnecessary. The majority of staff welcomed the leave. The positive feedback from staff was overwhelming.
22. Since the introduction of family violence leave in November 2014, 17 different individuals have used it across Australia, 12 of whom were women and 5 were men. A total of 45 days of family violence leave have been taken by Telstra employees since the entitlement was introduced.

Why Telstra chose to implement family violence leave entitlements

23. Telstra decided to implement family violence leave as part of its core business rather than simply donating money to preventative measures as the figures are so compelling. As one of Australia's largest employers, the likelihood is high that some of our employees are being affected by family violence.
24. Acknowledging family violence in the workplace reduces absenteeism, improves retention rates and has the potential to change staff attitudes and behaviours.
25. Additionally, Telstra's has partnered with WESNET to create Safe Connections, to help women impacted by domestic violence through the provision of smartphones, pre-paid credit and information on the safe use of technology. **Attached** to this statement and marked '[KP-1]' is a copy of Telstra's Submission by way of a letter dated 28 May 2015, containing more detail to Safe Connections. We recognised

that if we were going to create methods to assist victims of family violence externally through Safe Connections, we should also create methods to assist our employees internally.

Benefits to Telstra

26. There is a benefit to Telstra from an employee engagement perspective. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from employees who expressed their pride in working for an organisation that would acknowledge family violence and provide the requisite support. Companies benefit when their employees are engaged as they are more productive and they contribute more fully to the organisation.
27. We could see no significant commercial downside. Reputationally, it is important for organisations that we deal with to understand our values. It may assist the decision making of a potential client to deal with or purchase from Telstra.

Importance of workplace involvement

28. We believe that the workplace plays a vital role in acknowledging and overcoming negative behaviours and attitudes to issues affecting the community. For example, 10 years ago, there was less acknowledgement of mental health issues, but now most workplaces have mental health leave and conversations around depression are not as stigmatised as they once were. Whether the issue is depression or family violence, acknowledgement in the workplace is important to change underlying attitudes within the broader community.
29. Additionally, we also think it makes sense for employers to want to help support their employees to be safe and remain productive members of the workplace and the broader community.



Katherine Louise Paroz

Dated: 14 July 2015