



21 JUL 2016



Dear

On 16 May 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *The number of instances of verbal abuse and other abuse/assaults at the Timaru Work and Income Office for:*
  - *2015 financial year and calendar year*
  - *2016 financial year to date and calendar year to date*
- *The severity and type of abuse for the previous question.*

The State Sector Act 1988 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 outline the Ministry of Social Development's obligation to be a 'good employer'. This includes the Ministry's obligation to provide a safe working environment for its employees.

The Ministry places a high priority on the safety of its staff and clients. Our security policy is an essential component of the Ministry's strategy to reduce risks, not only to staff, but also to our clients. Abusive or threatening behaviour towards frontline staff is treated very seriously. If a security incident occurs staff enter the security incident in the Ministry's reporting database. Where appropriate, the incident is referred to the Police for investigation. The Ministry also provides follow-up advice and support for any staff involved in such incidents, including support through the Employee Assistance Programme.

The Ministry places security guards at all Work and Income offices. The duties of security guards are to observe, report and monitor in any disputes or conflicts and guide clients off the premises when asked to leave.

I will answer your questions in two parts.

*The number of instances of verbal abuse*

I can advise you that in 2014/2015, 23 incidents occurred that involved verbal abuse and that in 2015/2016 (to 31 March 2016), 7 incidents occurred that involved verbal abuse.

*The number of instances of verbal abuse and other abuse/assaults at the Timaru Work and Income Office*

The table below provides all reported incidents for the Timaru Community Link, broken down by nature and severity. It needs to be noted that verbal abuse incidents are not in addition to the full list of incidents – they are part of the same set of incidents.

You will note that the 2015/16 data is significantly lower than 2014/15. A national trend shows that after the tragic incident at Ashburton in September 2014, a number of factors resulted in a spike in the number of reported security incidents. The numbers reduced for the 2015-16 year to date. The national trend of declining incident numbers in 2015/16 is also reflected in Timaru.

**All reported incidents for the Timaru Community Link, broken down by nature and severity.**

<b>Incident Type</b>	<b>2014/2015 Financial Year</b>	<b>2015/2016 Year to 31 March 2016</b>
<b>Abuse</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>
Serious	4	0
Moderate	24	7
Minor	2	0
<b>Assault</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Serious	1	0
<b>Threats</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
Serious	2	0
Moderate	1	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>7</b>

**Note**

Critical incidents are the most severe incidents and include death, serious injury requiring hospitalisation, and bomb threats or arson.

Serious incidents include physical harm that requires medical treatment, threats made with an intention to harm, stalking or intimidation of staff.

Moderate include security incidents where there is aggression or abuse but no injury.

Minor are security incidents that do not fit with the other criteria.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public after ten working days. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

I hope you find this information concerning incidents of abuse at the Timaru Community Link helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman  
Office of the Ombudsman  
PO Box 10-152  
WELLINGTON 6143

Email: [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz)

Telephone: 0800 802 602

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Bound', with a stylized initial 'R'.

Ruth Bound  
**Deputy Chief Executive, Service Delivery**