



20 SEP 2019

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On 16 August 2019, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information relating to training and support provided to the Legal section and decision makers at Historic Claims.

The Ministry's Historic Claims Team is committed to delivering a service that is responsive to claimants and makes sure that people are supported as best as possible through the process.

For the sake of clarity, I will respond to each question in turn:

1. *For dealing with people who have experienced trauma, what training have your legal section and historic claim decision makers received?*
2. *If training was provided, when did it occur, who provided it and what did the course materials include?*

Historic Claims is committed to ensuring that staff are equipped to deliver a responsive service to claimants who have experienced trauma in their lives in a range of learning mediums, including formal training, individual reflection and learning, and on-the-job training and support.

Recent developments in Historic Claims (effective November 2018) resulted in Historic Claims increasing staffing numbers considerably, with a key focus on diversifying the workforce from both a cultural and skills-based perspective.

Staff employed by Historic Claims in claimant-facing roles are required to come with proven experience working with individuals affected by multiple issues, a sound understanding of the needs of people who were harmed as a result of trauma and proven professional engagement skills. Staff are expected to maintain boundaries whilst displaying personal attributes such as empathy and understanding towards the claimant.

In recognition of the responsibility that Historic Claims has in effectively responding to people who have experienced trauma, the focus areas for the continual professional development of the Historic Claims team are outlined below.

- Historic Claims is committed to strengthening its responsiveness and service to Māori claimants who have experienced trauma, which includes developing cultural competence within the Historic Claims workforce. In December 2018, Historic Claims contracted Te Awa Māori to deliver a cultural competency course to all staff. Subsequently, steps have been taken to utilise the skills

and expertise within the Historic Claims workforce to continue staff development in this space.

- Staff in Historic Claims received resilience training in the early part of 2019, provided internally by the Ministry's Learning and Capability Unit. Further training in resilience and trauma will be a continual focus of Historic Claims going forward, to ensure that staff are equipped to understand the dynamics of working with people who have experienced trauma.

The Ministry's Legal Services staff do not have contact directly with claimants. As such, the Ministry does not explicitly provide training to staff in Legal Services for dealing with people who have experienced trauma. The Ministry does, however, have a range of optional developmental workshops that are available to all staff. I can advise that some staff in Legal Services recently received training about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. These sessions are typically facilitated either by internal site trainers, qualification assessors, or in some cases external expert providers such as health professionals to help people in their daily work.

*3 What counselling/support is or has been provided to staff who have to work in the area of historic abuse resolution?*

The work environment in Historic Claims requires a considered approach to ensure staff have access to appropriate support, given their exposure to highly sensitive information and claimant trauma. Historic Claims ensures that staff working in this space are well supported, so that they can deliver the best possible service to claimants.

Historic Claims' Staff Wellbeing Strategy ensures that every staff member working in this area has access to wellbeing support, including:

- annual training focussed on working with people who have experienced trauma and staff resilience,
- regular coaching/support around dealing with challenging situations,
- the provision of immediate Critical Incident and Stress Management (CISM) support in the event of a critical incident, where appropriate; and
- access to the Ministry's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Historic Claims is in the process of extending the levels of support presently in place. For those staff who are required to read significant amounts of sensitive information, new staff are appointed a buddy/coach to support them in their role as well as provide forums for peer and team discussions around challenging situations, wellbeing, resilience and support around responding to reading distressing information.

For staff who are regularly engaging directly with claimants, a structured de-briefing process is to be held when staff return from challenging interviews or experience challenging conversations. Historic Claims will be implementing a model that involves mandatory external wellbeing health checks. Although this support will be mandatory for staff who have claimant-facing roles, this increased level of support will also be available to any other Historic Claims staff member on an as-needed-basis.

Historic Claims People Managers have access to a Manager Wellbeing Programme which supports them in their role in supporting their staff. People Managers can attend a one-day session, 'Responding to Mental Health', which is an introductory course run by the Ministry designed specifically to assist managers in recognising, relating and responding to wellbeing issues within the workplace. It is planned to run this course annually.

*4 How many staff members have accessed this counselling/support?*

As outlined above, all staff receive baseline wellbeing support due to the nature of Historic Claims work. External mandatory wellbeing health checks are required for Claimant Support Specialists (those who have regular direct contact with claimants). Historic Claims currently employs ten Claimant Support Specialists. As Historic Claims increases its service to include an Auckland Historic Claims hub, a further ten Claimant Support Specialists will be recruited.

Prior to the changes in Historic Claims, all claimant-facing staff members were registered Social Workers who accessed professional supervision as part of meeting the requirements of their practicing certificates. The Historic Claims Staff Wellbeing Strategy has been developed to support our new workforce, who come with a range of different skills and experiences. The Strategy will be regularly reviewed to monitor whether it is meeting the needs of staff.

The Ministry is not able to provide the number of staff who have accessed counselling through EAP. This is a private and confidential counselling and coaching service for anything that is impacting a person's wellbeing, whether its work related or personal. Staff do not need to notify their manager that they are accessing this service. As such your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act as the information is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown organisation.

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 and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. 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.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response, regarding Historic Claims and Legal Services, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Crombie', with a horizontal line underneath.

*pp* Stephen Crombie  
**Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Solutions**