Push for investigation after DHB death

Jonty Dine

The Public Service Association has requested an independent investigation into the Nelson Marlborough District Health Board’s workplace practices after a mental health worker died in a suspected suicide from what a colleague alleges was the culmination of extreme job stress. Workers in the DHB’s alcohol and drug department recently met with union representatives to discuss their concerns about the case and generally about the stresses they were under in the workplace. As a result, documents cited by the Nelson Weekly show that the PSA requested an independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the mental health worker, who died on August 14. However, the DHB rebuffed the request saying it would be inappropriate while a Coroner’s inquest was underway. A co-worker of the man who died, who wishes to remain anonymous, says long hours, an overload of cases, and his treatment by management contributed to his death. “He had a very happy home life, there were no issues or concerns there, he was a happy man and loved his family.” The woman says the man often worked late into the evening and on weekends just to manage caseloads. “He would go over and above.” She describes her job as a “powerless and humiliating” work environment. The woman says the mental health team at Nelson Marlborough Health are understaffed which affects their ability to care for clients. She says that the PSA had recently done a survey of the staff in the team which revealed that the feeling of disenfranchisement was widespread. “We do the best we can with the resources we have, we have tried to talk to management, but it has fallen on deaf ears.” The woman says, during performance appraisals they were pressured into taking on more work. The man had previously taken one week leave due to work related stress.

Sailor punching above her weight

Jonty Dine

Before she was even out of nappies or speaking in full sentences, Sailor Orlowski wanted to fight. Sailor grew up watching her father and four older brothers box and was always determined to prove she was just as tough. The Stoke resident would beg coach Dion Hall to let her fight but was always met with the same response. “You will have to wait until you’re older.” But now, after a long nine-year wait, Sailor will finally make her boxing debut at the South Island Golden Gloves this weekend.

Sailor will take on a Christchurch boxer fighting out of the Smiling Tigers Gym. She says she has never been so excited for anything in her life. “This is my one and only chance to win my first fight, you get heaps of Christmases.” Adding to the pressure of her debut is the fact all the boxers in her family won their first fights. “I have to win.” With seven siblings, including three sisters, Sailor is the first female in the Orlowski family to don the gloves. The diminutive ten-year-old has already garnered a reputation for her toughness.

Whakatū Boxing’s Sailor Orlowski will make her debut at the South Island Golden Gloves at Dixon’s Boxing this weekend. Photo: Jonty Dine.
Push for investigation

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She says his work with youth weighed on him heavily. “Youth are a lot more vulnerable and susceptible to reacting to risks and taking their own lives.” The PSA did not respond to requests for comment, however, it has previously publicly admonished the DHB for not listening to its requests to structure the mental health team’s correctly to allow for a healthier workload. Nationally, it has said that mental health teams were facing a “significant workforce crisis” which was exposing them to “dangerous levels of risk.”

General manager of mental health addictions and disability support services at Nelson Marlborough Health, Jane Kinsey, says 2020 has been a very challenging year. “We’ve had to do things differently to maintain a high-quality service throughout Covid-19, while managing an increase in referrals to our services.” Jane says some of the addictions support team have faced personal challenges this year. “Our thoughts are with them and their whanau.” She says it is a credit to the team that they have continued to provide high-quality care. “We value and appreciate their expertise and commitment.”

It’s ok to ask for help:
In an emergency: Phone 111
Free phone or text 1737 to reach a counsellor
Healthline: Free phone Healthline to talk to a nurse 0800 611 116
Free helplines available
Depression: 0800 111 757 or text 4202
Suicide Crisis Helpline: 0508 828 865
Youthline: 0800 376 633 or text 234

STOKE HALL TO REMAIN CLOSED: Nelson City Council has been unsuccessful in its application for funding to repair the Stoke Memorial Hall. “Council had applied to the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) for funding to undertake earthquake strengthening of the, but unfortunately the application was not successful,” says Roger Ball, group manager community services. However, in August council agreed that if the PGF application was unsuccessful, it would still proceed with the design work for the project, with physical works timing to be confirmed through the Long-Term Plan 2021-31. “The hall will remain closed until this work can be carried out.” He says a report is expected to be presented to the community services committee early next year regarding other improvements that could be made to the hall at the same time as the strengthening work is carried out, such as insulation, heating and acoustic treatments. Photo: Harri Jordan.