

Submission of Catherine Stewart

Catherine Stewart

Formerly a Postal Delivery Officer – Mooroolbark Delivery Centre

I believe my case highlights some of the problems with Australia Post's practices and procedures in relation to injured workers.

1. On 28 March 2007 I was sexually assaulted by another postie at my home. This led to psychological problems. I subsequently became involved in a very stressful 10 month internal Australia Post Inquiry into this matter. I also had three motor-bike accidents during this time, two while working at Belgrave Delivery Centre and one at Mooroolbark Delivery Centre which caused physical injuries. In hindsight it is possible my emotional state possibly contributed to these accidents. Motorbike posties need to concentrate 100% to stay safe particularly in difficult terrain like the area covered by the Belgrave DC.
2. Australia Post's insistence that I attend their company doctors affected my recovery. Australia Post management's pressure to attend work when I was not fit to do so greatly affected me.
3. At points 6 - 12 I describe the worst instance that happened to me. Please note that I complained formally to Australia Post about this incident. Australia Post reviewed this complaint and I attach these findings to this Submission.
4. On 6 August 2007 (P400 346062) while working at Belgrave DC I had a motor-bike accident causing bruises to thigh & calf, cut elbow, pain in arm/bicep/shoulder) and I rang the Centre, despite crying on the phone, I was left out there delivering for another 3 1/2 hours. At 3.30 in pain, I again rang the depot and asked for help (again in tears). Thankfully, [REDACTED] a fellow postie, who had completed her round and was leaving the depot to go home and heard my situation and offered to help and came out to meet me. She saw how upset I was and was concerned that I was in this situation. I was sent to an FND and was given light duties. I did not lodge a compensation claim.
5. On 24 August 2007 (P400 265699) I injured my left side ribs by falling down a steep drive with my bike during a difficult delivery. I returned to work and asked for a p400. I was obviously in shock and distressed. I then was told I had a 4.30pm appointment at the Australia Post nominated doctor. Even though I could barely walk from the pain, let alone drive (steer) my car, I then drove all the way to [REDACTED] to see the facility nominated doctor [REDACTED] I was then sent to [REDACTED] for x-rays. I did not return home from work until 7.30 pm that night.

6. I have only experienced pain like this in child birth, and found I could not stop crying from pain and distress the whole time. I was put on Panadene Forte and light duties for full hours for 6 weeks. I came to work and made labels for my rostered hours. On 27 August I saw [REDACTED] at the same clinic again who considered me fit for full hours restricted duties. (Evidently this was under the Early Intervention Program.)
7. On 28 August 2007, I had been unable to sleep due to the pain despite the painkillers, and I couldn't even make it to the shower to get ready to work. I rang work at 5.40am and explained this. I said I would be seeing a doctor. (as I was concerned that I was so incapacitated and in so much pain four days after the injury.) I was told that I would have to speak to management when they got in and I would probably have to get in there some way to clock on as it was Australia Post's policy.
8. At 9.10am I had a knock at my front door. It was [REDACTED] my team leader, it took a lot of effort to get to the front door, as it was obvious that I was in incredible pain. [REDACTED] said, "Hi [REDACTED] told me to give you this" (he handed me an envelope with my full name on it) he claimed he didn't know what it was about.
9. As he was saying good bye I opened the letter to see that it was saying I had to go for a Fitness for Duty assessment to another facility nominated doctor and that if I didn't I could receive disciplinary action. As we were saying good bye and I was reading this, my home phone rang. It was [REDACTED], my manager. She said in a very cold way, "Sorry mate, you have to come to work," (I subsequently established this was a directive from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED])
10. I was crying and shocked at my situation. I explained I was waiting for my sitter to collect my 5 year old son to take him to kindergarten and to care for him for the day. My sitter was also going to take me to the doctors. I did not understand this process or treatment from work. Nothing was explained. I felt so much like everything was my fault and was in fear of losing my job or being disciplined.
11. I have never been in trouble at work before. At 9.25am when my sitter hadn't arrived I rang [REDACTED] and told her. She said she would come and get me. Within 5 minutes she was collecting myself and my son [REDACTED] in the Australia Post Ute.
12. She had [REDACTED] (our office person) with her. I was in so much pain that [REDACTED] had to help me get in the car. My son was confused at why his mummy was crying and couldn't walk properly. In my distress I had put my uniform on inside out [REDACTED] then drove me and my son to his 'kinda' and so I could take him there.
13. It was a very painful 30 metre walk to the 'kinda' front door. The 'kinda' teacher saw me and my distress and could not believe this was being done to me. My poor son was very confused at the situation. All of the 'kinda' mums & kids saw me being dropped off and trying to walk to the 'kinda' in tears to drop my son off. When we arrived at work, I had to try and walk into the office in front of all the posties. It was obvious to all of them that I was in incredible pain and

distressed. I found this so humiliating and degrading. I didn't say anything to anyone, as on Friday I had been told by [REDACTED] I was not to say anything to the posties. I felt like a criminal. I felt very much like management had harassed and intimidated me into coming to work just to save their LTI budget at the cost of my health and wellbeing. I was and am still appalled that I could be treated like that when none of this was necessary .

14. On 17 December 2007 I came off my bike while working at Mooroolbark Delivery Centre when I fell from my bike due to a car reversing from a driveway – grazed knee, grazed left hand shoulder & bruising & sore left hand ribs. This was around the time of the report about the sexual assault was handed down. This time I attended [REDACTED] who gave me the next day off work. I was sent for a Fitness for Duty to [REDACTED] on 18 December. He assessed I had a capacity to work full time, gave me a period of restricted duties but stated that from 24 December 2007 I would be fit for full normal duties.
15. At this stage I had a breakdown partly the effects of the sexual assault but also because of the pressure to return to work prematurely.
16. I was only given one day off on compensation during all these injuries. After an unsuccessful effort to return to work to alternate duties where I could feel safe at work I resigned from Australia Post.