**Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review**

Submissions from women and men who have experienced discrimination at work while pregnant, or while on or on return to work after taking parental leave

**Submission Number 258**

**Part C Submission Response**

In 2004 I worked for a non-government organisation taking on a project role. I was on a contract for 12 months which would end April 2005. At the time of my employment there was flexibility of work location which was beneficial as I lived in a rural area. In late 2004 there was a number of staff who sought stress leave due to workplace bullying allegations but I was not one of the staff who took leave or were implicated in the bullying.

I was in my early 30's and had issues with fertility and then experienced a miscarriage. I became pregnant in October 2004. In December 2004 the CEO of the organisation sat down to discuss with me plans to extend my contract as I was performing well and she valued my contributions to the organisation. Another staff member was present through this discussion. I decided to be up front that I was expecting a child and would need to take some maternity leave to continue. That was initially accepted but then I raised the issue that my employment contract incorporated paid maternity leave. At that point the CEO indicated they could not afford to fund paid maternity leave and if that was expected the offer of a new contract was withdrawn.

I was stunned that this had happened but for fear that the stress of taking further action could have a detrimental affect on my pregnancy I chose to take no action. While another staff member witnessed the discussion I would not have relied on them to provide an accurate version of events. I understood the financial implications are difficult for smaller organisations who offer paid maternity leave, but cannot believe in 2004 I could have a job offer withdrawn due to being pregnant.

I remained out of the paid workforce for the next 6 years having 3 children within the first 2.5 years and being heavily involved in a farming business as well. When the time came to look for employment, despite doing a large number of activities of managerial capacity on the farm, articulating those issues into a CV and placing sufficient value on the skills learnt through motherhood were difficult. I struggled to sufficiently value the work and skills I had been using in those 6 years. I had been fortunate to be part of an organisation who supported the professional development of those involved in the grains industry. Participation in workshops conducted by that group (especially the skills in understanding personality), resilient rural leaders and facilitating small group workshops was the catalyst to giving me the confidence to return to the workforce.

I now work for a different organisation (larger public service) who are most accommodating.

I think further work promoting the skills and efficiencies of parents who juggle work and family commitments needs to be enhanced. Many people do not value the productive nature of those who work in a part time capacity and are seen as leaving on time or early, rather than what they have accomplished within their day. Sitting at the office til the lights are out does not necessarily make you the most productive worker.

National paid maternity leave schemes would remove the barrier I experienced to receiving a contract extension. Ongoing education to promote the productive nature of return to work parents would assist to change perceptions of people within the workplace who do not have children.

Access to some skill development and acknowledgement of the skills of parenting and self employment may assist those seeking to re-enter the workforce and give them the confidence to tackle that first job interview.

Access to after hours school care within rural areas can be very difficult. Improving this access would assist greater flexibility in returning to work