

New Zealand Defence Force

Emerging Diversity and Inclusion

The hierarchical structure of a military organisation, along with a traditionally masculine culture, can make calling out inappropriate behaviour difficult. But a new training programme rolled out by the New Zealand Defence Force is set to make having difficult conversations easier.

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) consists of three services: the Royal New Zealand Navy; New Zealand Army; and the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and is commanded and headed by the Chief of Defence Force.

In June 2017 the NZDF introduced Sexual Ethics and Respectful Relating (SERR) training for all its staff. The training was introduced as a prevention activity under the Operation RESPECT programme. Assistant Chief Defence Human Resources Colonel Karl Cummins says the overall aim of Operation RESPECT is to make sure all members of the defence force can do their job in an environment that is free from inappropriate and harmful behaviour.

“NZDF takes seriously its positive duty of care to keep its people safe. NZDF is a reflection of society and is not immune to harmful behaviour; indeed historic cases and reviews into NZDF contributed to recognising the need to undertake prevention activity. NZDF wanted to do something practical that would make a positive difference in its members’ lives,” he says.

SERR workshops cover a range of topics, including identifying harmful sexual behaviour and its impact, seeking help, building the skills necessary to develop healthy and respectful relationships, having conversations about consent, speaking out about inappropriate or harmful behaviour, and how to respond if someone shares that harmful sexual behaviour has occurred.

“It is hoped the enduring impact of SERR training will be a safe inclusive working and living environment, a decrease in harmful sexual behaviour, and a workforce that is both empowered and prepared to address harmful sexual behaviour,” says Karl.

SERR training is delivered by sector experts on all camps and bases throughout the NZDF. Chief of the Defence Force Tim Keating has mandated that training be delivered within 12 months for everyone within the organisation.

Video Link:

<https://vimeo.com/286975195>



"Few organisations in New Zealand have so deliberately and forthrightly set about tackling inappropriate behaviours, but together through our Operation RESPECT programme we have made great strides towards building a more respectful and safer work environment. Indeed, I think we lead many others in New Zealand in this space as a consequence," Tim Keating says.

More than 10,000 NZDF personnel have completed the training so far. The delivery method includes stories, roleplay, videos and activities, keeping all participants engaged and encouraging conversations.

"The SERR training is delivered via a workshop that enables everyone, regardless of rank, age, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, to have capable and courageous conversations on sex, healthy relationships, consent, and harmful sexual behaviours. These conversations highlight the capabilities of our people to own their leadership, and sow seeds of respect to cultivate an environment of safety, dignity, and inclusivity, therefore enhancing operational effectiveness," says Colonel Karl Cummins.



A participant survey on the initiative found 90 per cent agreement with the statement, "I believe that my service (Army, Navy, Air Force, or portfolio for Civilians) is ready to make a positive contribution to cultural change to prevent harmful sexual behaviour". There was also positive feedback from participants.

"I enjoyed the way this training was run. Sitting at a table with a group of people you have seen on Base but don't "know" and discussing what can be a delicate subject, was illuminating. There was a seriousness in the subject, but there was also humour. I enjoyed the training and came away with a very positive feeling for the future." Training participant, Feb 2018.

"Keep up the good work; this training has definitely generated healthy discussion in the work place." Training participant, Sept 2017.

"With increased exposure and education, this type of behaviour should not be swept under the carpet. Everyone should now know what the expectations are, and be aware of how to treat other people fairly and with respect. The Chief of Defence Force has made a very good positive stance on this." Training participant, February 2018.

The training has given personnel the tools and language to speak out about a difficult topic, says Karl. "The SERR training (and Chief of Defence Force's encouragement) that everyone speak out about inappropriate behaviour has given our people the mandate to speak out against inappropriate behaviour even if the person not living our values is senior in rank, which is difficult in any workplace hierarchy, and more so in the military."

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