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Unions support victims of natural disasters

Union members are playing a vital role in the recovery process of bushfire affected communities.

Unions NSW Secretary Mark Morey said unions were offering their members support to cope with the trauma they had experienced, as well as providing practical support rebuilding communities.

“This work will be needed not just for a few weeks but for a few years. It’s up to the union movement to make sure affected workers and their communities remain at the forefront of everyone’s mind,” Morey said.

Morey launched the innovative online professional development carried out by the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch to provide online trauma advice to 480 teachers and support staff, 350 of whom actively participated. Many were from the south coast of NSW, which was severely impacted by fires.

“This is a model for the type of support unions can offer their members. This initiative is bringing people together in an innovative way through a huge online union meeting. These innovative strategies enable workers to form connections and network with each other.” Morey said.

“It’s particularly important that teachers and school support staff, who are central to the recovery process moving forward, are offered this type of assistance.”

The course, *Responding to Bushfire Trauma*, was conducted (free of charge for non government school staff who are members of the IEU) by Professor Lisa Gibbs and Jane Nursey of the University of Melbourne, authors of the study *Delayed Disaster Impacts on Academic Performance of Primary School Children* (2019).

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Mark Northam said it was important for school staff to attend to their own wellbeing so they could provide the best possible support and education for their students.

“Schools and early childhood services are important community hubs during crisis, and we are doing our best to make sure teachers and support staff are supported and can continue to provide a safe haven for children,” Northam said.

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch is also claiming up to five days paid leave per year for employees, unable to attend work due to a natural disaster, in its current negotiations for the NSW and ACT Catholic Systemic Schools Enterprise Agreement 2020-2022.

Morey said all future awards and enterprise agreement negotiations should include considerations of our changing climate, with flexible arrangements to allow employees to deal with emergency situations such as the recent bushfires.

New guidelines on how to deal with hazards such as poor air quality are also required, he said. The ACTU is now examining all these issues.

“Unions will take a holistic approach to dealing with all aspects of climate change. Our members are at the front line when it comes to tackling natural disasters,” Morey said.

Further comment:

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 30,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post secondary colleges.

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