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New icare pilot program reduces customer abuse incidents by 48%

Insurance and Care NSW's (icare) groundbreaking pilot program *Respect & Resilience* has delivered a 48 per cent reduction in customer misbehaviour incidents at retail and fast food outlets by training retail staff in de-escalation techniques and improving retail environments.

Customer misbehaviour is a term that describes the spectrum of negative behaviours from physical violence and abuse to rude and disrespectful comments.

Sara Kahlau, Chief of Customer and Community said, "icare's Respect & Resilience program is a leading initiative to uncover the triggers and provide solutions to the customer abuse epidemic that affects almost 90 per cent of Australian retail and fast-food workers of all ages".

"I'd like to see the Respect & Resilience program adopted broadly by the retail and fast food industry so we can help as many frontline workers effected by customer abuse as possible.

"As a community, it's time to demonstrate that there is no tolerance for customer abuse and a need to stop the unacceptable behaviours in NSW workplaces that can lead to mental health issues," said Ms Kahlau.

The Respect & Resilience program was run in conjunction with The Reject Shop and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), both icare workers compensation customers. Also involved in the studies were the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA).

It follows commissioned research done earlier in the year with the Menzies Health Institute of Queensland at Griffith University. That research found that the risks and effects, from widespread customer abuse and violence in the retail sector are underestimated; and can affect a worker's physical, psychological and social health, which can be life threatening.

Geoff Garlick, Divisional Manager Central, The Reject Shop said the company is proud to have participated in this world-first research program and we will be seeking to adopt as many of the recommendations over the next few months.

"Frontline retail staff experience customer misbehaviour several times each day and the new program is providing new hope. Participating staff all spoke to the value of the Respect and Resilience program and the amazing confidence they have developed since attending the training.

"Younger retail workers found great worth in having a set of customer response rules to apply to aggressive situations and the benefit of role playing to best understand how to apply their learning. Our older workers really benefited from a focus on self-awareness and personal factors that they may have been contributing, which led to escalation of behaviour.

"Focus group feedback illustrated that the training also helped our teams to provide better customer service and deliver a best-practice response from our management team to serious traumatic

events,” said Mr Garlick.

Fastfood retailer, KFC partnered with icare through one of its large franchisee partners.

Karen Ancira, Chief People Officer, KFC Australia, said “This partnership with icare shows our dedication to growing the confidence and wellbeing of all of our team members across Australia. When people under-25 make up 90 per cent of your restaurant team, it’s really important that we continue to build their confidence to help them succeed and bring their best self to work”.

“Through the training that icare provided, our team members can quickly identify customer misbehaviour and have the ability to respond with de-escalation and resilience techniques. It’s amazing to see the sizeable reduction in customer misbehaviour incidents across our restaurants since this pilot has been implemented,” said Ms Ancira.

The success of the pilot program may enable the retail industry in reducing the number of costly claims from customer abuse.

Ms Kahlau said, “All Australian retailers have free access to icare’s Respect & Resilience research report findings, to help change the mindset that the customer is always right and acknowledge that staff need their support”.

“The results of the Respect & Resilience program are significant to all Australian retailers and their employees, who want to identify a way to reduce the number and severity of customer abuse incidents, yet still prioritise the needs of their customers,” said Ms Kahlau.

The Respect & Resilience report and key findings can be found at the icare website [here](#).

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