

ARTICLE: Camp staff vetted but not all school volunteers

As school principals call for nationwide police checks on camp staff after a convicted rapist abused eight schoolgirls, Rotorua camps say their staff are already vetted.

However, parents or caregivers taken by schools to help out aren't checked by the camps to ensure they don't have any criminal convictions involving children. It's up to schools to do that check.

On Thursday, 37-year-old Matthew Everson was sentenced in the High Court at Rotorua to preventive detention on nine charges of indecently assaulting eight young girls attending a camp where he was working.

The name of the camp and the school have been suppressed.

Everson had previously been jailed for rape, sexual violation and performing indecent acts.

Rotorua camps spoken to yesterday say all staff have a police check before being hired.

Tui Ridge Park programme co-ordinator Wayne Goodchild told The Daily Post both paid and volunteer workers were vetted for any position at the park, which runs school and church camps.

The park also runs school holiday camps.

"We do a standard police check on everyone," he said.

"Obviously, we can't take their word for it because we are working with children," he said.

However, the park had no control over who schools brought with them on school camps, Mr Goodchild said.

The camp does have policies to keep children safe while staying on site.

"Staff are never allowed to be alone in a room with a child," Mr Goodchild said.

Lakes Ranch Christian Camp only has volunteer staff working on site and its director Shelley Gapes said all volunteers working with children underwent a police check. International students who volunteer are also required to have checks.

"We have children on site all the time," she said.

"We also have a safe site policy. We don't allow anyone to wander around the camp if they aren't known to us."

Rotorua Principals Association chairman Patrick Walsh said schools relied on the camps to vet workers.

Principals had previously raised the issue with the Ministry of Education about all outdoor activity programmes having a national accreditation process, including vetting of workers.

They had also raised the issue about whether school parent helpers also needed to be vetted, Mr Walsh said.

However, the decision was that the risk was too small to warrant such checks on these helpers, he said.

"It's hard to get volunteers," he said. "I appreciate the seriousness and harm - it has an absolutely devastating effect on the family," he said.

"It's a principal's worst nightmare ... but we have to be real. [School camps are] part and parcel of New Zealand life. It's a wonderful experience for kids.'

Resume Check does pre-employment checks and screening for employers and offers clients information on legislation and privacy laws.

Director James Sutherland said everyone working with children needed to be vetted.

"A criminal check might not be enough. You can only identify these people through a thorough and robust pre-employment check," he said.

The Ministry of Justice doesn't keep a register of child sex offenders.

However, someone sentenced to an extended supervision order by the courts can be under the eye of Community Corrections for up to 10 years to protect the public, a spokesperson for the ministry said.

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