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## REGIONAL NEWS

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# Workers quit over action on abuse claims

by Sarona Iosefa

One of three Hebron Trust workers, who expressed concern recently at the trust's handling of sexual abuse allegations, has resigned, along with a fellow worker.

Both gave two weeks notice in lieu of pay on Saturday. They said yesterday they could no longer work in an organisation that insisted on staff silence on sexual abuse. They are now calling on the Catholic aid agency to be closed.

The Hotel Workers' Union, acting for the workers, says it may take up worker grievance of constructive dismissal.

The Hebron Trust, set up by the Order of St John for dysfunctional teenagers, became the centre of controversy when workers told "The Press" of concerns at the handling of sexual abuse allegations against a staff member last year.

The order has since removed the staff member facing allegations to Australia, and then to the United States for "emotional" treatment.

The resigned employees, who would not be named, said they were most concerned about the youth in Hebron care and the environment in which they were kept.

One worker said she was angry she was not told of the sexual abuse allegations when she began work with the trust eight months ago, and now she felt she had to resign because she knew it had not been dealt with properly.

The trust director, Mrs Cathy Harrison, said last night she was

astounded and shocked at the former workers' allegations. They were damaging to the trust's work, its staff, and clients.

There had been no suggestion of resentment or criticism of the trust when they resigned. The staff did not complain about the trust in their resignation letters or before staff when their departure was announced. She had had no formal complaints from them.

Mrs Harrison said the trust had no intention of closing. Its work was needed

and recognised by community groups and Government agencies it worked with.

She rejected allegations that the trust had responded slowly to allegations of sexual abuse. It had followed guidelines approved by the Department of Social Welfare and had acted immediately.

The matter was in the hands of the police, she said.

Mrs Harrison said staff were not told of the allegations when interviewing for a job, but were told after being accepted