

Pascale Stendell
Co-ordinator of the Cowra Support Group for Adult Survivors of Child Abuse
Cowra NSW 2794

1 March 2015

Re: Response to the Consultation paper *Redress and civil litigation* of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Thank you for enabling us to submit comments, suggestions, and questions related to the interim report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Thank you for conducting the commission in the way it has been to date. I have had comments from survivors who attended private sessions which commended the processes and the conduct of the people involved. They felt it had restored a bit of faith in the system and society we live in.

p10- National or State scheme?

Comment: A national scheme would be easier from a survivor's perspective especially if they were victims of more than one institution across more than one state. The statistics you are holding of 65,000 survivors to be supported is probably based on one lump sum per survivor. If a state-based scheme is adopted it could also blow these figures: confusion as to what has already been paid across state borders is very likely to occur.

Also from a technical viewpoint and extensive data management experience data sharing across states is if possible to be avoided. It is very likely to lead to different standards, solutions, and level of care in regards to data. It is also likely to be more expensive to implement.

Suggestion: Pro-bono consulting – survivors workforce

Many survivors living in Australia – and not necessarily in scope for this Royal Commission - are professionally highly skilled. Given the cost of a redress scheme, any pro-bono consulting could be considered from these survivors too. It would be a matter of tapping into this willing workforce for the skillset you are after hence reducing implementation costs. Examples include: data management, database implementations, project management; it could also extend to mental health professionals wanting to contribute their time on helplines etc.

My suggestion is to call upon this highly skilled and willing workforce for pro-bono consulting in order to avoid the potential hundred of thousands if not millions of dollars spent on a database solution.

Direct personal response

p12 - Principle: Institutions should make clear what they are willing to offer ... should ensure that they are able to provide what they offer.

Question 1: What will be put into place by the redress scheme to ensure this actually happens and the further harm you mention does not happen?

Question 2: What will be in place to ensure that the Direct personal response is delivered by people who have received some training about the nature and impact of child sexual abuse? (p13)

Question 3: Will the Royal Commission be specific about the training perceived as acceptable under the label of *some training*?

p14- Principles for counselling and psychological care

- *Counselling should be available throughout a survivor's life*
Comment: I support this principle as healing is a lifelong commitment.
- *Counselling should be available on an episodic basis*
Comment: I support this principle as it takes time to heal and learn new behaviours. As we peel one layer of issue and deal with it, the next layer has to be dealt with when it becomes relevant, and nothing is really sequential anyway. In a supportive environment the healing process is an everlasting cycle of improvement which also includes bouts of backward moves. In an unsupportive environment the ups and downs and arounds are even more common.
- *Survivors should be allowed flexibility and choice.*
Comment: I support this principle. Having co-ordinated a support group of adult survivors of child abuse for 4 years the feedback from the survivors is that support groups have an important role to play too in the support role towards healing and growth of the survivor.
Question 4: Any chance this commission could fund or explore ways to ensure there are more support groups around. Currently we only know of one such support group in the Central West, NSW. This gives survivors more flexibility and such groups do fill the gaps in between episodes of specific counselling needs.
- *No fixed limits on services provided to a survivor.*
Comment: Only if the services are appropriate.
- *Psychological care should be provided by practitioners with the right capabilities to work with complex trauma clients*
Comment: Access to the appropriate care in remote and rural is currently near impossible. (1) Counsellors and Psychologists are rare. (2) Mental health professionals with adequate experience hardly exist. (3) Trauma - Untrained /unexperienced professionals with little work ethics find it easy to ride the wave and be an ear, leaving their client in the victim role and not attempting to play a role in the long term healing of the person – actually trying to work with the patient, deal with the past layers which block daily life requires a lot more work.
Question 5: Will the Royal Commission consider how to fill the rural gap and propose flexible options for healing for the survivors unable to access city services?
- *Suitable ongoing assessment and review*
Comment: I support this principle. Access to lifelong psychological care will be a very costly and ineffective exercise without adequate controls at hand.
Question 6: Will the Royal Commission include in the final recommendation specific, measurable processes to assess the effectiveness of a service?
- *Services for family members if necessary for survivor's treatment*
Comment: I support this principle although family members need to be defined or refined.
Question 7: Could the Royal Commission consider extending the statement to the survivor's supportive environment? What if the support role is a friend living with the

survivor and key to the survivor's healing process?

Question 8: Will easy processes be put in place to assess that *there are no other sources of funding available* and make access to such services as transparent as possible?

p21- Monetary Payments - Other payment issues.

Comment: Despite reading these paragraphs, I feel we need to go back to the purpose of payment. Payment will not undo the past. At best it should make today's life easier.

Some survivors do not rely on the lump sum to live as they have coped well enough that they do not need the money. The other survivors - who have not coped in life, have not been able to engage enough to secure their finances or whose life has been such that they find themselves broke-, these survivors have different monetary needs. Flexibility is one thing but there would be situations where the environment they live in may create other situations of abuse because of this sudden access to money.

Question 9: How will the money be provided to ensure the survivor get the most out of it and most importantly does not find him/herself the subject of further abuse (such as domestic violence, family pressure etc) to release that money? Should a system of drip-feeding like a pension be the default mode of payment, and make it possible to get a lump sum only in safe situations and under further scrutiny?

p22-Eligibility for redress

- *any cut-off date by which the abuse must have occurred*

Question 10: Does this contradict the *no limitations principle in the law as to when a survivor can take a case to the legal system?*

Overall Comments:

1. The Royal Commission was set to be a 'Royal Commission into **Institutional** Responses to Child **Sexual** Abuse'. Survivors in the same institution of physical abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect would probably feel devastated to be deliberately left out as if the crime perpetrated on them was not of enough importance.
I just hope that existing support organisations could access further funds to deal with potential increasing numbers of these individuals seeking help – not in the scope of this Royal Commission but certainly relived during the years of the Royal Commission – especially if they were victims of the same institutions targeted by this Royal Commission.
2. The issue of policing or compliance to recommendations is the underlying concern behind my questions. Thorough recommendations come undone without compliance processes. People who have already been harmed are at stake as well as large amounts of funds.