



The Incest Survivors' Association Inc. welcomes the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in shining a light on this dark area of our society. We hope that the findings of the Commission will lead to a more robust and coordinated response to child sexual abuse from institutions in the future.

We wish to comment on Issues Paper No 6 regarding Redress Schemes and in particular, Question 11:

11. What sort of support should be available for claimants when participating in a redress scheme? Should counselling and legal advice be provided by any redress scheme? If so, should there be any limits on such services?

The Incest Survivors Association (ISA) was involved in the provision of support during the West Australian Government's Redress Scheme from 2007-2009, and was contracted to support claimants during the painful process of documenting their claim. Up to six sessions per claimant were funded for this purpose, and ISA provided 350 sessions of counselling and support to 63 claimants under this scheme.

Our service found that while this was adequate to do the contracted task (i.e. document the claim), the opening of old wounds during the documentation process left claimants significantly traumatised and requiring additional support before they could move forward. Frequently clients would self-fund up to six further therapeutic sessions themselves, or ISA would provide these sessions free of charge, leaving a significant funding shortfall for the organisation. This was eventually addressed by the State Government, with additional funding for further counselling and support sessions.

Many claimants identified that having support available during the healing process is vital and was identified by many claimants as more important than the actual financial compensation provided. Child sexual abuse is a devastating experience resulting in a range of trauma symptoms which vary in intensity and type. The effects are far reaching and impacting on all aspects of the survivor's life both in the short and the long term. In its most severe presentation the individual may present with the symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the same way a person exposed to the effects of war or natural disaster might. Effects include:

- Fear / anxiety related to unexpected triggering of memories / flashbacks, leading to a struggle to stay in the present time and adult state
- Disassociation, disconnection , hallucinations and flashbacks
- Confusion re boundaries and compromised boundaries - either hyper-vigilance or failure to protect self and others
- Sleep disorders – nightmares, leading to terror, re-experiencing trauma



- Reduced trust in self and others, and fear of intimacy, leading to compromised ability to participate in relationships.
- Self-esteem issues, leading to self-blame, self-doubt, guilt, shame
- Emotional dis-regulation / lability; repression, blocking, avoidance; fear of feeling; unexpected and uncontrolled anger
- Drug & alcohol abuse, self-harm and/or suicidality to avoid feeling
- Compromised communication and parenting skills

In summary, “telling your story”, while cathartic for some, involves re-triggering of memories and a likely increase in the experience of symptoms outlined above. Issues of this complexity and intensity cannot be addressed in a short time – healing from trauma takes time, and for many, requires long-term additional support.

We respectfully request the Commission to consider as a matter of urgency the need for counselling services to be funded and made available for all complainants in the period following the documentation of claims. We also respectfully request that careful consideration be given to the nature of the services offered to any claimants of the Redress scheme and less restriction be placed on the number of sessions to be provided and the time period over which they can be accessed. The healing process for community members impacted directly or vicariously by child sexual abuse is an issue that affects society as a whole, and ISA hopes for an assertive Government response in dealing with this issue.

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19 June 2014