

**IN THE MATTER OF  
THE BOARD OF INQUIRY  
INTO HISTORICAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN BEAUMARIS PRIMARY SCHOOL  
AND CERTAIN OTHER GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF JANE SWEENEY**

I, Jane Sweeney, Executive Director, Family Services, Evidence and Quality Improvement, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the **department**), of 50 Lonsdale Street Melbourne, in the State of Victoria, say as follows in response to the Notice to Produce issued by the Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools (**Board of Inquiry**):

**A. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

1. I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country on which I live and work, and the Traditional Owners of Country across all lands and waters now known as the State of Victoria, and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

**B. SCOPE OF STATEMENT**

2. I am the Executive Director, Family Services, Evidence and Quality Improvement within the department. I commenced in this role in August, 2021.
3. I make this statement to the Board of Inquiry in my capacity as Executive Director, Family Services, Evidence and Quality Improvement within the department.
4. This statement responds to the questions issued by the Board of Inquiry to the department on 30 October 2023.
5. In preparing this statement, I have consulted with subject matter experts within the department. I confirm the contents of this statement are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

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**OFFICIAL**

### C. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS

6. Prior to my appointment as Executive Director, Family Services, Evidence and Quality Improvement, I held the following professional roles:

- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
  - Executive Director, Women and Prevention of Family Violence - May-August 2021
  - Executive Director, Family Safety Victoria (FSV) - 2017 – 2021
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
  - Executive Director, Social Policy and Service Delivery Reform – 2016-2017
  - Acting Executive Director Aboriginal Victoria 2015-2016
  - Director Aboriginal Heritage Services 2013-2016
- Department of Planning and Community Development
  - Director of Corporate Strategy 2011-2013

7. My professional qualifications are:

- Bachelor of Arts, Australian National University, Aboriginal Studies and Anthropology 1994-1998.

### D. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** describe the Support services and Healing services for victim survivors of child sexual abuse, including specifically for victim-survivors of Historical child sexual abuse that are delivered, provided or funded by the Department, including:

- (a) a summary of the service;
- (b) the Department's role in delivering, providing or funding each service;
- (c) details of any external organisations involved in the delivery of the service;
- (d) the eligibility requirements of each service;
- (e) the number of hours or sessions each service is funded to provide to each victim-survivor; and
- (f) the average wait time for victim-survivors to receive services.

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**Department** means the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and its predecessors.

**Child sexual abuse** includes allegations or incidents of inappropriate behaviour or misconduct against children which may constitute child sexual abuse, grooming or boundary breaches.

**Historical child sexual abuse** means, in addition to definition in the Order, allegations or incidents of inappropriate behaviour or misconduct against children which may constitute child sexual abuse, grooming or boundary breaches by a Relevant Employee.

**Including** means including without limitation.

**Support services and Healing services** includes mental health, counselling or other therapeutic support, including emotional or practical assistance, provided to a victim-survivor or a secondary victim.

8. The department recognises that language use and terminology relating to victim-survivors of historical child sexual abuse is sensitive and contentious. How people choose to identify themselves, their experiences and the impact of the abuse are diverse. I understand from my experience working for the department that unfortunately, child sexual abuse rarely occurs in isolation of other types of abuse, including physical, psychological and neglect and the impact thereof. The department recognises the different labels that are given to and chosen by people who have suffered this abuse, including victim-survivor and for those in institutional care as children before 1990, Pre-1990 Care Leavers but also Care Leavers and Forgotten Australians. This cohort also includes the Stolen Generations and former Child Migrants.
9. The department funds multiple support services to assist victim-survivors of historical sexual abuse. Support services and Healing services discussed in this statement include the direct personal response (**DPR**) and counselling and psychological care (**CPC**) offered through Victoria's participation in the National Redress Scheme (**NRS**). Additionally, the department funds Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Services – Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN), Open Place and In Good Faith Foundation (IGFF).

### National Redress Scheme

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Response to 1(a)-(c) Summary of service, DFFH's role and other agencies involved

10. The NRS was established in response to recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (**Royal Commission**). The NRS began operating on 1 July 2018 and will run for ten years. It includes three components: a monetary payment of up to \$150,000, a DPR from the responsible institution, and CPC.
11. The Department of Justice and Community Safety (**DJCS**) is responsible for coordinating Victoria's participation in the NRS. My department is responsible for implementing the CPC service on behalf of Victorian Government institutions and non-government institutions and the DPR program on behalf of Victorian Government institutions. The Department of Education is a participant in the scheme.

CPC service

12. Until 31 October 2023, the CPC service in Victoria was delivered by a state-wide consortium of special service providers called Restore. Led by the South-East Centre Against Sexual Assault, specialist service providers included Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN), Drummond Street Services, Connecting Home and 12 Victorian Sexual Assault Services. The Victorian Aboriginal Care Agency, Open Place (Berry Street Victoria), and Gatehouse Centre were also previous members but withdrew their participation for various reasons during the period that Restore provided services.
13. A departmental evaluation of Restore was undertaken in 2020. Following this, the department worked collaboratively with Restore, and key stakeholders including people with living experience, drawing on learnings from the Royal Commission, 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Review of NRS and inquiries to redevelop the service model. This also included the Royal Commission report, Joint Select Committee 'Getting the National Redress Scheme right: An overdue step towards justice' 2019, Joint Select Committee First Interim Report on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme 2020, Survivor Consultation Report 2021 and Second-Year Anniversary Review of the Scheme report. This led to a number of changes to the CPC service which took effect from 1 November 2023.

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14. Since 1 November 2023, the department has administered the redeveloped model. Departmental staff provide intake, assessment and navigation to services based on a person's request. The counselling and psychological services are delivered by practitioners working privately and in non-government organisations who comply with the department's program requirements which stipulate necessary practitioner qualifications, registrations, and insurance.

DPR program

15. The department also leads implementation of the Victorian Government DPR program. This role includes policy, program design and development and delivery. The main objective of the program is to provide redress recipients with an opportunity to engage with the institution/s responsible for their abuse. This engagement can include sharing of experiences of abuse and its impacts, institutional acknowledgement, apology, and demonstration of accountability for abuse and its impacts, and an opportunity to hear what the institution is doing to prevent and improve responses to abuse.

16. The department employs a DPR Liaison Officer who works with the victim-survivor to arrange the DPRs, which can be delivered through a face-to-face and/or written response and/or any other method agreed. It involves a facilitator, support person/s as requested and an executive from the responsible department. The department recruits and trains external facilitators and executives from across government to deliver the service.

Response to 1(d) Eligibility requirements

17. The NRS is available to victim-survivors of child sexual abuse that occurred before 1 July 2018 where a participating institution was responsible for bringing the child into contact with the perpetrator. The Department of Education is a participating institution.

18. Until 31 October 2023, under the Restore service, to be eligible for counselling the person must have requested CPC at the time of accepting their redress offer in Victoria. Family members were only included in this service in the context of therapy with the redress recipient.

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19. Since 1 November 2023, under the Department administered model, eligibility has expanded to include all people currently or previously residing in Victoria when they accepted the offer of redress regardless of whether the offer included CPC. Eligibility has also expanded to enable direct service provision (not just indirectly via family therapy) to family members including by birth and choice.

Response to 1(e) the number of hours or sessions each service is funded to provide to each victim-survivor

20. Until 31 October 2023, under the Restore service, counselling and psychological services were limited to 20 sessions.

21. Since 1 November 2023, the service offering has expanded to include alternative therapies and remove the 20-session limit, based on practitioner recommendation, to allow for episodic and lifelong support. The alternative therapies include animal assisted (i.e. equine), creative arts, music and dance, mind-body somatic and casework for people with complex needs requiring support.

22. There is no limit on the hours available under the DPR scheme.

Response to 1(f) the average wait time for victim survivors to receive services

23. There have been no wait times for victim-survivors to receive CPC as provided by Restore and now administered by the department. All requests have been responded to as they have been received.

24. The department does not currently but is looking to track wait times for delivery of DPRs which can vary depending on the complexity of requests and preferences of participants. To manage increasing demand and preferences of victims-survivors, additional staffing resources and external facilitators have been recruited to manage requests in a timely manner.

**Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Services**

Response to 1 (a)-(c) Summary, role of DFFH and involvement of other agencies

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25. The Victorian Government estimated in the 2004 *Forgotten Australians* report that more than 90,000 Victorian children were placed in institutional care either by the state or voluntarily by families and others prior to 1992.<sup>1</sup>
26. Of these the department estimated that 50,000 children were state wards between 1928 and 1989. Many experienced various forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse during their time in care. For children, this care experience included attendance at schools located in their care settings (i.e., attached to orphanages) or locally. The proportion of this cohort that experienced abuse in educational settings is unknown.
27. The experiences of Pre-1990 Care Leavers including instances of sexual abuse are also outlined in the Royal Commission's final report<sup>2</sup> and the 2013 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations (Betrayal of Trust).<sup>3</sup>
28. The department funds the delivery of state-wide advocacy and support services to Pre-1990 Care Leavers. It has been considered appropriate to fund specialised services for this cohort because, whilst Pre-1990 Care Leavers are not a homogenous group, it is generally acknowledged that the structural disadvantages they typically experienced may have contributed to increased poor life outcomes compared to the general population. Many have a range of health, mental health, social, financial and educational needs which continue throughout life and into old age. Older Pre-1990 Care Leavers have growing and complex health needs and may need increased assistance with accessing health services. The department has funded Care Leavers Australia Network (CLAN) and Open Place since 2008-09 and In Good Faith Foundation (IGFF) since 2020-21.

<sup>1</sup> *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children* (2004)

<sup>2</sup> [Final report | Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au\)](http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

<sup>3</sup> [Family and Community Development \(parliament.vic.gov.au\)](http://parliament.vic.gov.au)

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29. CLAN is a national and independent peak body which represents, supports, and advocates for people who were raised in Australian and New Zealand orphanages, children's homes, missions, foster care and other child welfare institutions. Support services provided by CLAN include counselling. Other services include assistance with locating family members, assistance with NRS applications, support to access records and ward files, advocacy for individuals to access government and non-government programs and services to meet their needs, referrals to other services, and social get togethers.
30. Open Place, delivered initially by Berry Street and now by Relationships Australia Victoria, provides Pre-1990 Care Leavers with support services including counselling as well as a range of other services including social support groups, brokerage (financial assistance for health and practical needs which cannot be addressed through other avenues), co-ordinated support, community education, a drop-in centre and support to access records.
31. Both Open Place and CLAN also receive funding from the federal Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide a Redress Support Service and Records, Find and Connect Service.
32. In Good Faith Foundation is funded by the department to provide case management and advocacy for victim-survivors, families and communities impacted by institutional abuse. This may include assisting victim-survivors to access support services such as counselling, psychological services and mental health care, as well as other services such as legal representation and social welfare services.

Response to 1(d) Eligibility

33. Eligibility for access to Pre-1990 Care Leaver support services is determined through a Confirmation of Time in Care record. This is the evidence that a person spent six months (cumulative) or more in institutional out-of-home care in Victoria.

Response to 1(e) the number of hours or sessions each service is funded to provide to each victim-survivor

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34. The funding model does not specify or limit an individual victim-survivor's support to a particular number of hours or sessions. Funding is based upon annual targets for the service as a whole. The service provided seeks to respond to individuals' issues and support needs.
35. The department's current Service Agreement for Open Place includes the following annual targets: 2,600 counselling sessions, 8-10 clients per case worker, brokerage delivered in accordance with agreed guidelines and available budget, 100 social support group sessions and events, and 90 community education sessions.
36. The department's current Service Agreement for CLAN includes the following annual targets: support at least 300 Pre-1990 Care Leavers with advocacy and support services, provide at least four opportunities for social events and gatherings in Victoria, support at least 150 requests to access records, participation in service system meetings to contribute to policy and program development, and ongoing development and implementation of strategies to improve capability.
37. The current IGFF Service Agreement includes the following targets: 160 hours case management support, 320 hours specialised support, and 3 community education sessions.

*Response to 1(f) the average wait time for victim survivors to receive services*

38. Wait times for services provided by Open Place, CLAN and IGFF are unknown because they are not recorded by the providers.

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**Question 2:** *In relation to any support services or healing services described in the department's response to question 1 above:*

- (a) whether the Department is generally aware of any barriers to victim-survivors accessing or using those services and if so, details of those barriers;*
- (b) whether any of these services provide access to peer-support;*
- (c) how victim-survivors are directed to these services;*
- (d) how communication with victim-survivors could be improved;*
- (e) how the Department has evaluated if the services available to victim-survivors of child sexual abuse and historical child sexual are effective and trauma informed; and*
- (f) how the Department ensures lived experience perspectives are included in the design, implementation and evaluation of services.*

**Response to 2a - Barriers to service access**

39. Victim-survivors of child sexual abuse can experience a range of barriers to accessing support services, depending on their particular circumstances and experiences. As my statement is focused on the particular support services available under the NRS and the Pre-1990 Care Leaver Support Services, my response is focused upon barriers to accessing those particular services.

**NRS**

40. The specific barriers to accessing the NRS are the general eligibility criteria, set out above at 17. As set out at above at paragraphs 18-19 the specific eligibility criteria for the CPC service and limits upon the number and type of funded sessions have also been barriers to accessing support services under the NRS. However, since 1 November eligibility has been expanded as well the types of support services funded, and the limit on the number of sessions has been removed.

**Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Service**

41. As set out above at 33, eligibility for services is determined through a Confirmation of Time in Care record. A barrier to accessing the service is the

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lack of records. The department recognises that people who historically entered out-of-home care in Victoria, especially under voluntary arrangements, often experience difficulties locating and accessing records of their placements. The department acknowledges the lack of records and therefore evidence can make it difficult to access services or redress. The department undertakes every effort to support people to obtain Confirmation of Time in Care records needed to access state-wide services. The approach taken varies depending upon each person's experience but can include searching under different names or contacting different institutions.

42. Other barriers to accessing the service include the low literacy that Care Leavers often have. This is addressed further below in response to questions 2(c) and (d).

**Response to Question 2b - Access to peer support**

NRS

43. People accessing the NRS are able to access peer support if they choose to. The national website for the NRS directs victim-survivors to a number of services to assist in making an application under the NRS.<sup>4</sup> Some of those services provide peer support. Questions about access to peer support provided by other services would be best directed to those services.

44. In relation to those aspects of the NRS administered by the department, as outlined above at 16, the DPR process includes support persons. The CPC service does not include peer support.

Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Service

45. Open Place, CLAN and IGFF provide numerous opportunities for peer support through their service delivery. Peer-support provides people with an opportunity to connect with others with a shared sense of identity, experience and knowledge of the care experience and the lifelong impact it has had on their lives.

46. At Open Place, this is provided through a drop-in centre located at the organisation's Richmond office and through fourteen social support groups which

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/support/explore/vic-redress-support-services#04>

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meet regularly across Victoria. CLAN similarly holds regular 'socials' as opportunities for people to come together.

47. IGFF delivers community engagement and peer support through regular meetings of the Victorian Survivors' Collective (VSC). The VSC enables victim-survivors obtain peer support through engagement with other victim-survivors, to provide feedback, engage with government and institutional leaders, and contribute to IGFF's strategic priorities.

### **Response to Questions 2c and 2d - Communications about services**

#### **NRS**

48. Victim-survivors are directed to the NRS through a range of communications and services, this includes via the department's, the Department of Justice and Community Safety (Victorian Government lead), and Victorian Government websites.

#### **Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Services**

49. People can learn about Pre-1990 Care Leaver services via the department's website, the DSS website, individual organisational websites (CLAN, Open Place, IGFF) and via their newsletters. The education and literacy levels of Pre-1990 Care Leavers has often been impacted as a result of their experiences. The challenge is to communicate with Pre-1990 Care Leavers in a way that is accessible using terminology that is inclusive of the diversity of their experiences and self-identification.
50. Communication with victim survivors could be improved by being more accessible to people with low literacy. Further work is required to develop audio and visual communication tools for people with low literacy and reach people who may need support but are yet to or do not self-identify as victim-survivors or Pre-1990 Care Leavers.

### **Response to Question 2e - Service evaluations**

#### **NRS**

51. As outlined above at 13 an evaluation has been conducted in respect of the CPC service provided by Restore and a number of changes have been made as a consequence.

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52. The department has not yet undertaken an evaluation in respect of the DPR.

Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Service

53. The department is currently undertaking an evaluation of Pre-1990 Care Leaver support services. The funding of these services lapses on 30 June 2024. The evaluation includes analysis of the efficacy of the service provided and potential gaps and opportunities for improvement. The evaluation will inform the 2024-25 budget process and is expected to be completed in November 2023.

54. The service review will examine the efficacy, delivery, and cost effectiveness of Pre-1990 Care Leaver support services. It will include review of client feedback given to the service provider, evidence of current and projected service demand, analysis of governance and management and issues, risks, and opportunities for strengthening service provision.

55. Previous service evaluations have been undertaken of Pre-1990 Care Leaver support services. In May 2016, a KPMG review of the delivery of support services to care leavers in Victoria was completed, including Open Place and CLAN. In May 2019, HDG Consulting completed an evaluation of Open Place. These reviews are confidential, but they were positive about the services and led to continuing and increased funding to meet demand.

56. Further work is planned to map and identify policy and service delivery gaps for people who have left contemporary institutional care through to historical settings.

**Response to Question 2f - Inclusion of people with lived experience in service design, implementation and evaluation**

57. The department is committed to engaging people with living experience in all aspects of the policy and program lifecycle. Based on stakeholder feedback, the department uses the term 'living experience' to signify the ongoing impacts of abuse on victim-survivors.

NRS

58. In the design and implementation of the Victorian Government DPR program model, feedback was obtained from key stakeholders including people with living

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experience. As mentioned above at 13 victim-survivors were consulted in the redevelopment of the CPC service.

*Pre-1990 Care Leaver Statewide Support Service*

59. The program requirements for Pre-1990 Care Leaver services stipulate that the people who use these services are critical partners at every stage in their design, development, delivery and ongoing evaluation, and victim-survivors have been included in the service design and implementation. Transparent and non-biased approaches to selecting people for participation in governance and recruitment are used to ensure a diversity of voices are embraced beyond known and active advocates. Fairness and safety are foremost when involving people in these processes. Lived experience of past care is recognised as expertise and harnessed in both voluntary and paid roles.
60. Previous evaluations have also included victim-survivor involvement. In the current evaluation, client voice will be captured through existing mechanisms in place for these organisations.
61. There are plans to strengthen the inclusion of people with living experience, noting the announcement by the former Premier of the new redress scheme for historical care leavers included a commitment to co-design.<sup>5</sup> Further work planned includes to:
- input the voices of people heard in restorative engagement initiatives into departmental policy and program design
  - establish a variety of new mechanisms to engage a diversity of people's lived experience expertise. For example, through the establishment of a lived experience register for people to record their interest in participating in opportunities which may include advice on a suite of new communication tools or in the development of a new policy or program.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/past-care-leavers-we-hear-you>

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Print name: ...Jane Sweeney .....

Date:.....10/11/2023.....

Witness:.....  .....

Date ...10/11/2023.....

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