

## **Submission to the Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools**

12 October 2023

To the Board of Inquiry,

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the important investigation into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and other government schools. As a Counselling Psychologist with seven years of full-time practice in clinical assessment and treatment of childhood sexual abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and trauma, as well as written reports on behalf of victim-survivors [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], I would like to provide insight and recommendations based on my professional experience.

### Transparency:

One significant issue that emerges from my experience is the lack of transparency surrounding the reporting, recognition, and legal and psychological support processes available for historical childhood sexual abuse victim-survivors. Both professionals and the public often struggle to understand the civil and criminal legal proceedings and treatment available, making the process feel daunting and confusing for victim-survivors. Establishing a nationally recognised, body with comprehensive information about accessing information regarding legal proceedings, psychological treatment options, and related support networks would greatly assist victim-survivors. An Australia-wide body is particularly important given the mobility of some survivors who may move interstate, seeking distance from the locations where the abuse occurred, as well as a consistent message and service for all victim-survivors and associated parties to refer to.

### Taboo and Stigma:

Childhood sexual abuse remains a deeply taboo and stigmatized issue in society, often leading to the dismissal, denial, and silence surrounding reports of abuse. Addressing this taboo is crucial in preventing the perpetuation of silence within institutions, like government schools and the community. Publicly supporting victim-survivors who advocate for themselves and acknowledging their experiences can help reduce feelings of isolation and empower survivors to come forward. Schools associated with convicted offenders should prioritize healing and recognition over reputation preservation, in a way that is transparent and empowering.

### Unseen suffering of family members:

It's important to note that the impact of historical childhood sexual abuse extends to family members and partners who often suffer unknowingly in silence. Providing psychoeducation, public recognition, and psychological treatment can support their mutual understanding and recovery. The impacts and strategies used by victim-survivors to cope with the trauma symptoms, can often be misunderstood. Social isolation, substance misuse, addictions, criminal activities, unemployment or interrupted work,

and relationship difficulties tend to be observed in victim-survivor PTSD sufferers. These maladaptive ways of coping are often a consequence of unprocessed trauma psychologically and physically, which can also negatively affect family members. Acknowledging and addressing these interrelated impacts is crucial to improving the quality of life of victim-survivors and their families.

#### Delayed Reporting:

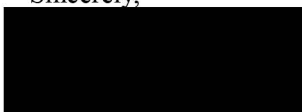
Many victim-survivors delay reporting childhood sexual abuse for various reasons, including the psychological impact of grooming behaviours by perpetrators, learned distrust in authority figures, and shame. They often decide to come forward when they learn of public avenues like Royal Commissions or Inquiries where they believe they may be taken more seriously can contribute to protecting future generations from harm. Recognizing the reasons behind delayed reporting is essential to addressing this issue effectively and learning how institutions can be proactive.

#### Prevention and Training:

An intention to support proactive prevention of childhood sexual abuse in the future is a motivating factor for many victim-survivors who come forward. While no legal proceeding or monetary compensation can fully compensate for the trauma endured, it can help improve their quality of life and aid in recognition of the traumas suffered. Mandatory updated and repeated training for all school staff on recognition, appropriate agency liaison, support, and informed reporting of abuse, sends a clear message to victim-survivors and potential abusers alike, as well as the public stance on protecting children in schools from sexual abuse.

In conclusion, it is imperative to address these issues comprehensively to provide support and justice to victim-survivors, empower them to come forward, and work towards a society where childhood sexual abuse is prevented.

Sincerely,



Counselling Psychologist

