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Nicholas Webster

Advocate to Morris Pitt

To the Committee

My name is Nick Webster, I write to you today in regards to my dealings with Redress while advocating for one Mr. Morris Pitt. I write to you with respect and I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about this.

Just before Christmas of 2019, Morris rang me and finally came out to me about what had happened to him as a child, to which I could not commend him enough for finding one, the courage and two, the trust in me to be able to express to me what had occurred. He expressed to me how hard it was for him and his wife Eleanor to cope and how hard it was for him to find help being in such a remote area. He explained to me about how the government had set up Redress for the victims of childhood abuse in institutions and I was very taken back at what he told me. I won't go into great detail as he has already provided that to you today. Before our conversation I had no idea about Redress or what they even were, let alone trying to take in what I had just been told. I told Morris that if at any time he felt it was too much having to deal with Redress and how he was made to feel by them that I would come on board and advocate on his behalf as I could hear in his voice how much trauma it was causing him.

I have been advocating for Morris for around 16 weeks now and also in that time often having to counsell Morris in his times of need because he is left to fend for himself without due care from any service he tries so desperately to engage with, but the people he talks to either end up crying on the phone to him or going silent as they don't know what to say or the phone gets disconnected. This is a constant battle for him being in such a remote area.

My first instance advocating for Morris was in having to deal with his case manager (I will provide a name off the record if appropriate, but for the purpose of this letter I will refer to the case manager as "Jackie"). I was given a number to ring by Morris as this was the number he was using prior as a contact for "Jackie", after I got off the phone to Morris I rang the number he had given me and requested to speak to "Jackie", to which I was told she was not available and that an email or message would be sent for her to get in contact with me as soon as possible. Later that day I received a phone call from "Jackie" and I explained in great detail who I was and that I was now advocating for Morris to which she had no objections but we couldn't go into detail until she had proper clarification from Morris that this was true and correct.

I then asked "Jackie" what the overall situation was and why they were not fulfilling their requirements to Morris with respect to helping with counselling, psychologists and other things implemented and set down by the Royal Commission's recommendations, to which I was told by "Jackie" that she had contacted all the psychologists in the public system in Morris's area but she was finding it very difficult

to find anything suitable. I was told how disorganised things were in regards to Redress and that they were still getting things set up. This was very profound so I then asked “Jackie” if I was to just get off the phone to her now and try and find some help for Morris would that be appropriate and would that be an acceptable way things could go forward as I didn’t understand if that was something I was allowed to do. “Jackie” responded with something to the effect of “yes that would be great if you could do that, it would save me a lot of phone calls, if you do happen to find one could you ring me back? Just give me the details and I will give them a call to go through what we do and what we can provide to them”. I thanked her for her time and did just that.

Within one phone call I had found Morris a trauma counsellor in Toowoomba, QLD, which was approx. 3 hours away from where he is living. I rang back his case manager and advised her that I had found one for Morris; to say she was grateful would be an understatement. I gave her the details of the counsellor I had found and she assured me she would follow this up with them the next day. That was fine as I was receiving a phone call from the counsellor to go through the details the next day anyway and felt I could take this up with him then and make sure he was to ring me if Redress had not contacted them. When I spoke to the counsellor I was very confident I had found Morris someone who he could connect with as this particular counsellor had many different areas of expertise and I was very confident in his abilities. I believe it was on a Friday I rang “Jackie” to find out if she had contacted the counsellor to be told by her that the counsellor was on board and would see Morris, that Redress had to do some paperwork but this would take up to a month to get done but she was putting some urgency on it. I received a phone call from the counsellor to be told the same correspondence I was told previously by his case manager, so I was quite happy with the outcome and was excited to finally give Morris some good news and something to, as they say, put the wind back in his sails. I rang Morris straight away and being this was a Friday the good news might allow him to somewhat enjoy the weekend. Well, all sounds great in theory doesn’t it, but we are now 2 months down the track and still Morris has not received any counselling service and is left on his own in a rural area to deal with himself.

Now that is just one instance of advocacy for Morris to Redress and hopefully will give you some insight to the lack of care they give their clients and let’s not forget here that these people are victims of childhood sexual abuse. They put their trust at such a young age in a system that failed them, let’s not have that happen again. Redress fail in their duty of care to provide the help and support let alone the respect that these victims deserve, instead treating them as they were treated back in the institutions; just a number, a problem and something that doesn’t matter. I say this with the upmost respect and please don’t take me out of context, but I ask the committee if this was you having to go through this, how would it make you feel? I ask you to please think about the victims and put yourselves in their shoes.

I close with saying, I am very pleased that Morris had the courage within himself and trust in me for one to come and ask me for help, as I can truly see how disorganised and flawed the system really is. The system in place by Redress is in fact quite inadequate, it lacks empathy to the victims, understanding of the victims needs not just at the particular time but as a whole. These people and yes, they are people, they have feelings and that is what Redress forgets. That is what needs to change before anything else. I find when dealing with anyone from Redress all you seem to get from them is their opinion. Not one

person has told me the same thing yet. In the end I got sick of dealing with opinions so I started to ring Federal Ministers to see whether they could help to which I was directed to Anne Ruston. I rang Anne on one occasion and spoke to a receptionist who I then asked how Morris could get out being part of the Redress scheme to be told quite openly that the only way he could do that is if he were to sign a declaration waiving him the right to pursue civil litigation, and that they would request he put everything he wanted in an email and send it to the minister.

That in itself is entrapment, please correct me if I am wrong. As you can see, this is just a few instances where, in advocating for Morris, I went and sourced a counsellor and it fell on deaf ears to Redress, as well as an instance at a Government office. I hope my omissions have been helpful to the committee and I thank them with the upmost respect for giving me the time to voice my concerns.

Kind Regards,

Nicholas Webster.