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Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Children in institutional care

MONDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2003

PERTH

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SENATE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Monday, 8 December 2003

Members: Senator Hutchins (*Chair*), Senator Humphries (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Knowles, Lees, McLucas and Moore

Substitute members: Senator Murray for Senator Lees

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bishop, Carr, Chapman, Coonan, Crossin, Denman, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Harradine, Harris, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Nettle, Payne, Tierney, Watson and Webber

Senators in attendance: Senators Humphries, Hutchins, McLucas and Murray

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- (a) in relation to any government or non-government institutions, and fostering practices, established or licensed under relevant legislation to provide care and/or education for children:
 - (i) whether any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred in these institutions or places,
 - (ii) whether any serious breach of any relevant statutory obligation occurred at any time when children were in care or under protection, and
 - (iii) an estimate of the scale of any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children in such institutions or places;
- (b) the extent and impact of the long-term social and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect on individuals, families and Australian society as a whole, and the adequacy of existing remedies and support mechanisms;
- (c) the nature and cause of major changes to professional practices employed in the administration and delivery of care compared with past practice;
- (d) whether there is a need for a formal acknowledgement by Australian governments of the human anguish arising from any abuse and neglect suffered by children while in care;
- (e) in cases where unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children has occurred, what measures of reparation are required;
- (f) whether statutory or administrative limitations or barriers adversely affect those who wish to pursue claims against perpetrators of abuse previously involved in the care of children; and
- (g) the need for public, social and legal policy to be reviewed to ensure an effective and responsive framework to deal with child abuse matters in relation to:
 - (i) any systemic factors contributing to the occurrences of abuse and/or neglect,
 - (ii) any failure to detect or prevent these occurrences in government and non-government institutions and fostering practices, and reporting mechanisms
 - (iii) any necessary changes required in current policies, practices and reporting mechanisms

In undertaking this reference, the committee is to direct its inquiries primarily to those affected children who were not covered by the 2001 report *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, inquiring into child migrants, and the 1997 report, *Bringing them Home*, inquiring into Aboriginal children.

In undertaking this reference, the committee is not to consider particular cases under the current adjudication of a court, tribunal or administrative body.

In undertaking this reference, the committee is to make witnesses and those who provide submissions aware of the scope of the inquiry, namely:

- (a) explain the respective responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states and territories in relation to child protection matters; and

- (b) explain the scope of the committee's powers to make recommendations binding upon other jurisdictions in relation to the matters contained in these terms of reference.

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Committee met at 9.04 a.m.**DAVIS, Ms Lorraine Dorothy Cecilia, (Private capacity)**

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing and welcome everyone present today. The Senate Community Affairs References Committee is inquiring into children in institutional care. The inquiry addresses very important issues that affect the lives of many Australians. The committee has received hundreds of individual submissions, both public and confidential. These submissions provide the stories of many people who have spent time in a range of religious, government and non-government institutions across Australia over many decades. The committee are grateful to these people for sharing their life stories with us.

I remind everyone appearing today that their comments are on the public record. Caution should be exercised in your comments so that individuals are not identified and cases before courts are not referred to. Local print and electronic media may be in the room during the day. If anyone has any concerns about that, please see the committee secretariat. The committee prefers that evidence be heard in public, but evidence may be taken in camera if you consider it to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Davis—Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR—The committee has your submission before it. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, which will be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms Davis—On behalf of the thousands of Australians who spent their childhood years in institutions around the country, I demand government funding so that we can run support groups for those forgotten survivors of brutal and traumatic childhood years. Funding needs to be made available to run retreats where people can mix with others who have suffered the same fate and know what it is like to have no family and to be brought up as state wards, home kids, foster children et cetera. Support groups will assist in the healing process that we all need. I was fortunate in that I knew my family, but, being brought up with very sad girls, some of them not knowing who their parents were because they were born out of wedlock, I have witnessed first-hand the effects of this situation. This was the same for boys. Back in those days, some people thought there was something physically or mentally wrong with illegitimate children. We demand funding for these unfortunate Australians to assist them to trace their families. Funding is also needed for counselling, health care, dental care and housing, and financial assistance is needed for furniture and white goods and personal growth et cetera. A high proportion of these people who were brought up in institutions suffer from some sort of mental illness. These people should be given free access to psychological and psychiatric support.

I would like to add at this point that the single mothers pension was the best thing that ever happened for mothers and babies. Losing my own mother as a two-year-old, after I was already bonded to her, was extremely horrific and traumatic; it has left me with lifelong consequences. We want our lives restored to the levels they could have achieved if the means had not been destroyed by state wardship and welfare. We see this as a rite of passage to take our rightful place in society, free of disadvantage and powerlessness. We want access to the same support as

the stolen generation, child migrants and adoptees. Many are still searching for their families and identities. They need access to their state ward files and other pertinent records.

We demand funding for a national office for CLAN in Sydney, New South Wales. The Care Leavers of Australia Network puts out a monthly newsletter in which members can advertise various activities, including reunions and social gatherings. The newsletter includes reference book lists and stories from people who were institutionalised as infants and children, as well as other useful information. Subsequent to my story, photo and telephone number appearing in the *West Australian* on Wednesday, 3 December 2003, I have been inundated with calls from Western Australians who are also part of the forgotten generation, some of whom are now middle-aged. The stories they tell are so sad, as the hurt of being raised without your family has lifelong effects that still hurt as you get older. We desperately need support groups so that the healing process can start. Being with others who know what it is like to have a traumatic childhood and no family will let them know they are not alone.

CHAIR—In your submission, you talk about being taken to the Lachlan Park asylum.

Ms Davis—The Lachlan Park asylum, now called the Royal Derwent.

CHAIR—Can you expand on what that meant to you, what happened there?

Ms Davis—It traumatised me. I think I have been traumatised all my life. Now I have done a little bit of research. My psychiatrist has said that if I have been traumatised then my children will be traumatised. The effect was that I left Tasmania. I could never live there. I never let anyone get close to me. I was frightened to talk too much because I might let it slip that I had been in a lunatic asylum, because of the stigma. I have been traumatised all my life, being in so many difficult situations. Even just being in a home was bad enough, but we were discriminated against—and in the convent. A lot of girls from the Good Shepherd laundry, whose spirit the nuns could not break or who the nuns thought were troublemakers, were put down in Lachlan Park. I was not the only one, but I think I was the youngest who was put there.

CHAIR—Have you ever been back to Tasmania since you left it?

Ms Davis—Yes, I have. I went to Launceston when I was in the Air Force, when my mother was alive. The last time I went to Tasmania was two or three years ago, when my younger sister passed away. We went to Hobart—I had not been there for years—and to Salamanca markets. Then we drove down to Sandy Bay. My sister, who was dying at the time, said, ‘There’s Mount St Canice Avenue.’ I drove around and turned back and started to drive up there. I got flashbacks. I just had to get out of Hobart as soon as possible.

CHAIR—Have you ever had an opportunity to confront any of the people or the institutions that were responsible for putting you through this at all?

Ms Davis—The only confrontation I had was when I was rescued from the lunatic asylum by the Whites. There was an investigation when Mr White was minister for health, but I do not know where to get the records. Three of us went on separate occasions. On one occasion I went. I had the nun from the Good Shepherd, who was in charge. She was in front of me, with the welfare officer sitting next to her. I had that chance to confront the welfare officer particularly,

because she told me I was going on a holiday. I cannot find the records of this inquiry. I am going to keep trying.

CHAIR—We have read in a number of these submissions that the records are patchy or that there is some rule that says they get destroyed after 50 years or that they are hidden down the back. Is that your experience—that it is very difficult to get, say, the handwritten notes about Lorraine Davis in Tasmania, why that happened to you and what happened there?

Ms Davis—No, but I have found out with the Ombudsman’s inquiry at the moment that I was not a ward of the state when I was driven down to Lachlan Park, but I was driven down there by the welfare officer who worked for the Tasmanian government. Sorry, what did you ask?

CHAIR—I just wondered whether, being with CLAN, you thought it was a usual experience of records being unable to be found—they are on the top shelf, not the middle shelf—until you persist? We had a bit of evidence in Adelaide.

Ms Davis—I was fortunate enough to get the history of the Good Shepherd Convent in Tasmania, which opened in 1893. For years there were rumblings about what was going on down there, but nothing ever happened. Right up to the 1960s, I think, they still were not paying wages. The Good Shepherd nuns played the sympathy vote by saying they were looking after us fallen girls. They got money for all the girls who were in the convent, plus they got the free labour. But I know that after the investigation into the convent, no more state wards or children were allowed to be sent down there.

I did meet some older girls in Launceston who were down at the convent. They were out living in a hostel, so all the older women must have had to be released too. Then the convent closed down. I was lucky that I got this information. They said they did not take teenagers, but there have been stories in the paper, and I have an article here from the *Mercury* in 1948, where a 13-year-old and a 14-year-old girl jumped from a third floor window and were in a serious condition in Royal Hobart Hospital. I am not giving up; I am doing more research, because I would just like to know which was the first one to close down. I wonder if it was the Hobart one.

CHAIR—How long have you been a member of CLAN?

Ms Davis—Three or four months ago, and I found out something I did not know. I found out that these Good Shepherd laundries were in every state. I rang up to get some information from the archivist of the Good Shepherd order, but he wanted to know my name and why I wanted to know, and I thought, ‘Well, they wouldn’t give me any information,’ so I did not get any information from them.

CHAIR—How helpful has being a member of CLAN been to you to help you deal with these demons?

Ms Davis—It is wonderful. I thought no-one could have a worse childhood than I had, but after reading some of the stories from members of CLAN I realised that what happened to me was not as bad as what happened to other CLAN members in institutions. I can relate to people who were brought up without a family, because I have gone through it. I hope that we can keep going with CLAN and start it up in Western Australia, because there is a need for it. A lot of us

are middle-aged, but the hurt does not go away; what happens to you as a child is with you all your life.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Ms Davis, you said that you had no schooling between the ages of eight and 12 at the Magdalene Laundry. Was that the case for all the children who worked in the laundry?

Ms Davis—Later on they did have a missionary, but I do not think she was a qualified school teacher. When we first started schooling, another girl and I were the youngest there, and one of the older auxiliaries used to read us stories. Her name was Scholastica; but she was not really a teacher. Then later on I think they had older girls in the afternoon for a couple of hours, but that was towards the end.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you think the nuns were supposed to be teaching you and they were just not doing so because they wanted you to work in the laundry or do you think that, at that stage, it was acceptable for people as young eight to be working in a laundry and not getting any schooling?

Ms Davis—I think it was. It was a village of old women and nuns, and I do not think they knew what our rights were as wards of the state, but they must have known they were doing wrong, because they vetted all our mail in and out. If we had a visitor they sat next to us so we would not say anything. The government just put girls down there and said, ‘The nuns will take care of them,’ and forgot about them. A lot of girls seemed to be born out of wedlock or they were orphans and had no families to stick up for them. I think this went on at various Good Shepherd convents in other states where the girls were taught.

CHAIR—If I could interrupt, Senator Humphries. A Channel 7 film crew want to know if they can do some filming. Does anybody have a problem with that? If not, they can proceed.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did they tell you why you were being taken to Lachlan Park asylum? Did they give you a reason?

Ms Davis—No.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Were you ill at the time in any way?

Ms Davis—No. When the girls got out of the convent, they just disappeared. You were not allowed to say goodbye or anything. Muriel was my best friend and when she went missing all the other girls said, ‘She’s gone to Mother Peter’s office; she’s probably getting out.’ We all had our little groups in the convent. I was absolutely devastated that my best friend had got out. I refused to work. Mother Peter tried to comfort me and told me that I could get out when I was 16. I screamed at her and told her that she was a liar and asked her why hadn’t all the older women got out when they were 16. Because I screamed at her in front of all the other girls and called her a liar, the Reverend Mother said that I had to apologise or I would have to go. I did not apologise, because I wanted to go.

Then the welfare officer came into the story. I was taken to Mother Peter’s office, my bags were packed and I went out the front to Sister Shott’s Morris Minor. She told me I was going on

a holiday, which I was absolutely elated about. She drove me down there and when I got to the children's ward at Lachlan Park I knew it was not a holiday. I had heard about other girls in the convent whom the nuns had put down there. They never told me anything. I did not like to talk about what happened to me. Even when I went to the Whites I did not ask why I had been put down there. I knew that I had gone on strike. I was best friends with Muriel. I thought that they could not have put me in there because of that. Some years later I wrote to Mrs White and said, 'Why did they put me down in Lachlan Park?' She wrote back to me and said, 'You silly girl; don't you remember? They put you down there because you went on strike.' So that is why I was put down there.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You say that you have been doing some counselling courses. Who provided those courses?

Ms Davis—I did them myself. I have done counselling 1, and I have also taken a facilitative course at Tuart College.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are they courses to help you counsel other people or to help yourself?

Ms Davis—To counsel other people and to run groups for people.

Senator HUMPHRIES—This is a difficult question: what has been the hardest burden for you to carry? Is it the sense that you were separated from your mother and your father during those years or was it the mistreatment that you received in the places that you went to? What has been the worst aspect of what you experienced as a child?

Ms Davis—The worst thing I experienced as a child was when my parents' marriage broke up. I am the fourth child. The fifth child was a boy called Joseph who died at 10 months of age. My mother was pregnant at the same time with my younger sister. The death of a child I could not imagine being so horrific. When my younger sister, Gloria, was three weeks old, my mother left my father. I think she had postnatal depression. That was not heard of in those days. The most traumatic thing was being put in the nursery at the girls home when I was two and my sister was three. There was so much crying because we missed our mother. Missing our mother was the worst. There were things that we suffered at the girls home. We were discriminated against because we were home girls and things like that. The next bad thing was being in the Good Shepherd laundry.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So separation from your parents, your mother particularly, was the worst thing, the hardest thing, you had to bear?

Ms Davis—Yes. I think removing a baby or a toddler from their mother is one of the cruelest things that can happen to any child.

Senator MURRAY—Ms Davies, one of the common themes of people in institutions is a sense that it only happened to them or those around them and a lack of knowledge about how widespread it was. That is the same problem that people in public life and bureaucrats have. We are trying to piece together how large this was, how many children were affected, because of the obvious consequences to large numbers of Australians as adults. You may not remember because

you were just a little girl, but do you remember how many children were in the Launceston girls home when you were there?

Ms Davis—About 50.

Senator MURRAY—And how many were in the Magdalene—Good Shepherd—Laundry in Hobart?

Ms Davis—It was about 100, I think; between 80 and 100.

Senator MURRAY—And how many were in the Lachlan Park asylum in Hobart?

Ms Davis—In the children's ward?

Senator MURRAY—Yes.

Ms Davis—About 50 or 60.

Senator MURRAY—In a sense Mr and Mrs White saved you from a much worse situation, if I understand your submission correctly, but he was also a public figure. Do you remember being interviewed or recorded at the time about your experiences and explaining what your problems were then with the various institutions? Was there any attempt to find out the facts from your perspective?

Ms Davis—There was an inquiry in Hobart when Mr White was the minister for health. Three of us convent girls went on different days. There was an inquiry; I am just trying to find the records.

Senator MURRAY—But did anyone take a statement from you? Mr White knew you had direct experience of three institutions in Tasmania.

Ms Davis—No, because I do not think they realised how traumatised I was. They did not ask me much. I remember when I came out of the lunatic asylum and went to the Whites' I became ill and Dr Gahr, who was in Tasmania at the time, came and visited me when I was sick.

Senator MURRAY—You have mentioned in your submission something which comes through in other statements—that is, to get to a stage of resolution of some healing or being able to deal with it you actually need a point of confrontation, of having your past internally recognised. In your case you say, 'At the age of 40 I had a breakdown,' and you indicate that after that you were able to better confront and deal with your circumstances. Would it be your advice to the committee that, in a public policy sense, there need to be facilities and services available so that when people reach the stage of being prepared and ready to deal with their problem they have got somewhere to go and somewhere to access? In your case, you indicate that the Niola Hospital and its psychiatrist were very good for you. You said it was a painful time, but a relief.

Ms Davis—Yes, because I blocked all my childhood away and I did not want to remember it. I left Tasmania at age 18 and I had never talked about it—even my friends did not know. But

when I was 40, I had a breakdown and the psychiatrist, Dr Veltmann, at Niola got me to speak. She drew out my childhood and I cried a lot. I think I should have got help a lot sooner, because I was 40. That was the first time it had come out.

Senator MURRAY—Did you know where to go? How did you find the help you needed?

Ms Davis—I did not know how to find the help I needed until I had the breakdown and realised that you need to talk. You have to confront what has happened to you.

Senator MURRAY—Did your doctor refer you to a psychologist?

Ms Davis—A psychologist referred me to Dr Veltmann.

Senator MURRAY—That is the psychiatrist.

Ms Davis—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—How did you first get to the psychologist?

Ms Davis—I was all mixed up. I did not know who I was. Because of my childhood, I went to see the psychologist to try to put the pieces together, and she was very helpful. She had me sitting in one chair and sitting in another chair was a nun. Then I decided to go on a holiday down to Mandurah for six months—I have a sister down there. I thought that as a result of being near the sea and sand my depression would lift. But when I came back—I was living at Middle Swan at the time—I went to see the psychologist. I said I still felt depressed, and she said, ‘Lorraine, you need medication. I am going to refer you to a psychiatrist.’

Senator MURRAY—I am asking you these sets of questions deliberately, and they are in line with those that other senators have asked you. It seems to us that one of the great problems with a large community of people who are hurt as children and remain hurt as adults is that they have no sense of where they can go, how to find the CLAN or the services which assist you and so on. One of the answers we should seek is whether better provision of those and specialist services would assist. In the process of looking for help, what sort of time frame are you talking about? How long were you looking until you got help? You say you had a breakdown at the age of 40. You said you went to Mandurah for six months and eventually you reached a hospital with a psychiatrist. How much time elapsed while you were looking for help?

Ms Davis—If I could go backwards, I should have got it a lot earlier. I think everyone who was brought up in institutions and went through trauma needs help early—specialist treatment. But I was still ashamed of being a homes child. When you are brought up there and it is ingrained into you when you are young, it is hard to change. I was ashamed of being in the girls home and the Magdalene convent and ending up in the lunatic asylum. I was sort of ashamed and I kept it hidden, because I thought people would discriminate against me.

Senator MURRAY—But you are with us now and you have written and told your story. That is not only helping you but it is going to help a lot of other people.

Ms Davis—That is why I am telling my story.

Senator MURRAY—Yes, I understand that. But you had been in the forces and had jobs and you were married and had three kids. You broke down at 40 and you are now 61. From the time you said, ‘I have got to stop being ashamed. I have got to actually try to deal with this; I need somebody to help me,’ how many years was it until you arrived at the situation where you were with a psychiatrist who helped you?

Ms Davis—About 30 years. I should not have kept it that long, because it was very traumatic.

Senator MURRAY—If you had known that there were services available, do you think you would have taken them up much earlier?

Ms Davis—Yes, services like CLAN where you mix with other people, hear their stories and have something in common with them—being brought up without a family and that sort of thing.

Senator MURRAY—Child migrants in this city have a house where they have assembled for years now. It has been of great help to them because of the same circumstances. That is all I have, Mr Chairman.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you, Ms Davis, for sharing your story with us. You said very clearly in your oral presentation that government support is required. Are you involved in CLAN’s organisational side in Western Australia?

Ms Davis—They did not have anyone over here for CLAN. When I joined CLAN I learnt all the information and read submissions. I think it was three years ago that they started. They have a newsletter and you can get other people’s stories and that. It sort of made me understand, as I said, that a lot of foster kids and home kids et cetera still need help. Even though we are middle-aged, and some are older, the hurt does not go away if you have not had a family.

Senator McLUCAS—Can you tell me whether CLAN has government funding or support? Who funds the operations of CLAN in Western Australia?

Ms Davis—No-one funds CLAN in Western Australia.

Senator McLUCAS—It is all by volunteers; care leavers themselves are keeping the organisation going?

Ms Davis—Yes. But with the national office in Sydney where they do most of the work—the newsletters et cetera—they do get a little funding from Victoria and New South Wales, but none from Western Australia.

Senator McLUCAS—You talked about the need for support for care leavers in terms of counselling and assistance with housing and a range of other services, but you did not say compensation. Why didn’t you say that?

Ms Davis—I did go a few years ago and they said that the statute of limitations was up. When I was in the WAAF at Laverton in Victoria, Mr and Mrs White came back for a holiday from London. I met them in Melbourne. We stayed at the Coffee Palace. At breakfast they told me that I could be a very rich girl if I wanted to be for what happened to me, and that, if I did sue, they

would help me. Also, if I did sue, the whole Catholic Church would turn against Mrs White, and Mrs White was a very religious woman—a strict Catholic. I did not want anything to tarnish the Whites' reputation. That would have been in the statute of limitations. So I did not sue. The main thing I tried to be grateful for is that Mrs White said, 'Lorraine, what happened to you was bad, but at least something good came out of it,' and that was the closing down of the Good Shepherd Laundry and all the girls being released. Mrs White was a volunteer at St Joseph's Orphanage; she was a volunteer at a lot of places. That is why I did not seek compensation.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you. Finally, do you know how your situation came to the attention of Mr and Mrs White? Was it because she was a volunteer or was it because of the role of Mr White as the minister for health?

Ms Davis—It was both of them. Because Mrs White was a volunteer—I am volunteer too, because I wish to be like her—I started off at St Joseph's Orphanage. Muriel, my best friend, used to mind the Whites' youngest child, Nicola, when she was a baby, when Mrs White was doing her volunteer work. One day Mrs White went there and noticed Muriel was missing and she was told that she was put down the back in the laundry. So Mrs White must have found out, and they helped Muriel to get out of the convent and get a job. So that is how it came about. Then after what happened to me, I wrote to Muriel and she went to see the Whites and told them where the nuns had put me. That is how they found out.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you very much, Ms Davis.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Davis.

[9.41 a.m.]

NILSEN, Mrs Delma Elizabeth, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mrs Nilsen—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee, if you would like to do that, or we can go straight to questions—whatever you would like to do, Mrs Nilsen.

Mrs Nilsen—Just the questions.

CHAIR—Mrs Nilsen, given your experience with various placements and foster care, what do you think needs to be done to ensure good, stable environments for children in foster care?

Mrs Nilsen—That is very hard to say. I do not know because I have never known of any, only my own—what it was like.

CHAIR—Tell us what you think from your experience should be looked at.

Mrs Nilsen—I think there should be proper places for them to live—not such a big place as an orphanage. They should not be like prisons, like we were in. I always referred to Bidura as a children's prison, and it was a horrible place to live in. You never knew where you were going to be living or sleeping because you never knew when you would be fostered out or sent back, and it was not very nice.

CHAIR—How many children were you with when you were at Bidura?

Mrs Nilsen—I would say hundreds.

CHAIR—Were they boys and girls?

Mrs Nilsen—No. The boys were there only until they were five years of age and then they were separated from their sisters, if they had sisters, and they were sent to the boys home.

CHAIR—Which one was that?

Mrs Nilsen—I do not know; it was just down the road. I was only nine when I left there the last time. I remember my mother leaving me there at three and I remember going backwards and forwards to it.

CHAIR—Have you been back to Bidura at all?

Mrs Nilsen—No, I would not go back.

CHAIR—Not even to confront your demons or anything like that?

Mrs Nilsen—I could not go back. I do not even want to go back to Sydney, let alone that place—altogether there were six different homes before I was the age of nine. It was horrible. We were sexually interfered with. I was only five years of age when he got caught. I can remember the addresses of everywhere I lived and they can always be checked. I can remember right back to all the addresses quite plainly, even from when I was four or five years of age. I just blocked it out. The last place I went to was not too bad. It was in the bush in New South Wales near Wagga. It was like a mini farm. We were sent there mainly because it was wartime and there were no men around and somebody had to work. It was the kids from the orphanage who went there to work. There were two others. A brother and sister went there a year before me. I still keep in contact with them.

CHAIR—When did you start to deal with these matters? Was it, as we have heard in a lot of instances, in your late 30s or early 40s?

Mrs Nilsen—As a kid, if you have not known anything different you accept what is happening to you, even though you do not like it and you are scared and you cannot talk. You were scared of saying anything in case you got sent back to Bidura. You did not know who you were. You got taunted by other kids. I can remember when I saw the film *Prisoner* that I said, ‘They still wear the same uniforms as what we had,’ only they were adults and we were kids. You never had nice clothes. You never went anywhere. You went to church every second Sunday with all the kids yelling out at you in the street.

You had no identity. I am 70 and I have just found out my father’s name. I do not know whether he is dead or alive. I am trying to find out. I have brothers and sisters in America. I do not think they even know I exist. I am still trying to find out how I can go about getting in contact with them. I have seven children and they all want to know. I was lucky: I had a fairly strong mind so I just got on with it. But it is as you get older and you see things on TV or you read things that the doors open. My second partner, my husband George, was the one who taught me that I could be myself and that I did not have to be frightened of saying what I wanted—I did not have to be scared of anything. It was him who taught me. But I was 35 then. I had met my mother once.

CHAIR—So it was from about 35 that you—

Mrs Nilsen—Yes. I have always been able to talk myself out of it but there is always something to bring back the memories. You do not forget being interfered with as a child. I can still remember what he looked like. I can still remember they called him ‘Blue’ because he had red hair. From there I went to a place where they had racing stables. That family still has them. I

went from one place to another place and then back to the orphanage. I even remember the orphanage telling me, 'I hope we don't see you back here again.'

CHAIR—Did you deal with the New South Wales department of child welfare or whatever its name was? Do you remember them being involved with you during that period?

Mrs Nilsen—No. They kept in contact. You never knew when they were going to turn up. I would come home from work and there would be a black car sitting out there. There was one lady, Mrs Smith, who said she did not have to worry about me anyway because I always looked after myself and made sure that nobody could say anything to me when I started working and got myself going in my own life. Apart from that, I just got on with it. It has not been easy. My first husband was a Mafia boss who ended up in jail as a drug runner. That was not a very pleasant part of my life, either. It was not until I went to Darwin and met my husband that I was able to really get on with everything.

CHAIR—How important has it been for you to find out who your father was? You said he was a boxer.

Mrs Nilsen—I only just found out his name. I knew he was a boxer with the Sharman boxing tent. I rang Mr Jimmy Sharman, but he is very old now and he cannot remember. Nobody seems to. I have got a father who is very elusive. Whether he is dead or whether he is alive I do not know. I know my mother is dead. I just want to know. I want to know who I am, and I do not know who I am. They have told me that he is part Aboriginal, but I do not know for sure and I want to know. I do not know how to go about finding out.

CHAIR—Did you ever meet him?

Mrs Nilsen—No. I have not got a clue. My mother was only 17 when I was born. She did not get on with the family. I did not know she had family until I was in my 20s. I do keep in contact with them now. In fact I have to go to Sydney to look after her sister, because she is 90 and she is getting older and she needs someone to help her.

CHAIR—Were most of the girls in the homes illegitimate?

Mrs Nilsen—I do not know.

CHAIR—They never talked about it?

Mrs Nilsen—No. I remember them talking about court and things like that, and I remember not knowing what court meant. I can remember we were not allowed on the lawn or anything like that. There was a peach tree right down the back near the incinerators. About four of us all took a little nibble each and we got our mouths washed out with soap and castor oil and were sent to bed. The food was horrible. We only got bread with golden syrup on it at night-time. You got a slice of that and if anyone took an extra slice that meant someone went without. Another little girl and I would have to take a kerosene tin and sweep up the leaves at the front every morning and then cart them down to the incinerator. Everybody worked. The older girls looked after the younger ones in relays. All the kids worked. It was not a very nice life. You went to school on the premises. Then I went to Cookardina. That was only a little bush school. I was

just lucky my foster mother was a schoolteacher from England and she taught us quite well. That was the only reason. We all had to really work. You were up at dawn and you did all the work—milking, bees, everything; we had the whole lot—and then when you went home from school you started again. That was your life. There was no electricity, no gas, no nothing. We only had lamps and wood fires.

CHAIR—This might be a tough question, but did it take until you were about 35 and you met your second husband before you found love and affection?

Mrs Nilsen—Yes, that was it. He was the first person in my life that showed me any love and affection for who I was at that time. He would not have cared if I was an axe murderer. He just cared. He died seven years ago.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator MURRAY—The committee are having hearings where we are dealing with young people who are having serial foster experiences right now—they are experiencing some of the same problems that you outline. I counted at least six occasions on which you were shifted through foster homes until, I think, you spent a final six years with just one foster home.

Mrs Nilsen—Yes, but he didn't like me!

Senator MURRAY—No, well. We all know the problems of institutions, because of the evidence we have received about the nature of institutions. As somebody who has seen both sides—being in the institution, which obviously was awful, and then being in foster homes, which were also awful; you described one as 'a miserable bloody place'—do you think that, if you have got children who have just two alternatives, then an institutional setting, which is at least one place, or being shifted through a series of foster homes—

Mrs Nilsen—That is what I wanted to say. I have been asking myself whether we would foster children from Hamelin Court and Rockingham. George and I wanted to adopt another one and we could not because he was a ship's master and he was at sea for six weeks at a time on the oil seismic boats. So they said no, but they said that we could foster a child. I refused. We would have loved to foster a child if we could have kept it. We would not have wanted anything from the government—just to look after that child ourselves and know that that child was going to stay with us. But the government could come along and just take that child and say to it, 'You are going to another place.' That is wrong. The children never knew where they were going to live, where they were going to sleep, whether they were going to be belted, raped or anything else. They should have just gone to one family and been left there until they were old enough to decide what they wanted themselves.

Senator MURRAY—Let me understand: if the government cannot develop a policy whereby a child stays with a foster family permanently—and it obviously needs to be a good and decent family—is it your belief that, rather than being shifted through a series of homes, the child is better being in an institution of some kind?

Mrs Nilsen—That is very hard; it depends on the institution.

Senator MURRAY—It does. But that is the choice.

Mrs Nilsen—I know, but it depends. Children will be naughty if they do not realise who they belong to, where they belong and how long they are going to be there for—so they will play up. I have one daughter in juvenile justice. But if they go to that one home where they know they are going to have a bit of love and a bit of care, they will be all right. They are not usually naughty. They will respect that person if they are given respect.

Senator MURRAY—In summary, and I want to make sure these are not my words but your words, you are saying that a home is better than an institution, but you need to be in a good home.

Mrs Nilsen—Yes. I can remember that in the institution at night we would have tea—that is what we called it then—at about 6 o'clock. After you had your tea, everything was taken to the kitchen and you sat on a grass mat and you did not talk. No-one was allowed to talk. You sat there, then the bell would go and you would get up and go to your dormitory. There was no pillow. I used to think to myself that if I had a pillow, even if it was only very thin, I would have been happy. Now I have a dozen pillows on my bed every night, and all my kids are the same way—they all have lots of pillows and even the dog has a pillow! It was cruel in those days, and you were too scared to say anything. That is no life for a child. They are the memories you have. The other memories you can think of are of things that were fun—we did this and we did that—but not that aspect of life.

Senator MURRAY—Your submission tells us two things we have seen elsewhere. You tell us that love is a great cure when you have been hurt. But the other thing you have told us is that you ended up in a very unloving circumstance at first. You say: 'Frank was a very cruel, sadistic and violent man.' We have seen in a lot of submissions that many institutionalised or fostered children with a bad upbringing have ended up with bad people. Why would that be? Why would you have ended up with somebody who, in any circumstances, reads as a dreadful person?

Mrs Nilsen—At the age of 19 when I met him I was on my own and he was nice because I suited him—I had no parents to worry him, I had nothing and so he was all right. But he gradually got worse and worse until, after 13 years, I ran away. I ran to Darwin. There is a lot more behind it that I do not even want to think about discussing—I cannot.

Senator MURRAY—Please take your time. Are you saying to us that if someone is—

Mrs Nilsen—If he had been nice and loving, I would have been happy.

Senator MURRAY—Yes; if someone is vulnerable—

Mrs Nilsen—Yes; you can get caught up.

Senator MURRAY—There are certain characters who prey upon vulnerable people.

Mrs Nilsen—I worked for 20 years in Sydney opposite Central Court in a shop. Truthfully, I knew all the prostitutes because they were our best customers. A lot of them were in the same

position and their stories are so sad too. They were all vulnerable, and men take the vulnerable ones like that.

Senator MURRAY—Tell me, if you can, what your first husband's background was.

Mrs Nilsen—He was Italian, born in Reggio in Calabria. He came out. He had a brother here. The kids keep in contact with him; I do not. He was all right, Charlie, but Frank was the bad one.

Senator MURRAY—He came from a normal family background?

Mrs Nilsen—Yes, a normal Italian background. He just was not a nice person. He just could not control himself in any way—in temper or anything. When he was nice he was very, very nice; but when he was bad, that was it. He was sort of the boss in Kings Cross of the mafia lot. So you can imagine I was not going to say too much to him. He would have a drawer full of money from the club and a gun sitting on the top of it. So what do you think I was going to do?

Senator MURRAY—You say, 'I also now have all my children back.' You said in your submission that this man forced you to give up your children for adoption.

Mrs Nilsen—He did.

Senator MURRAY—Are those the children you have back?

Mrs Nilsen—Yes; I have them all back.

Senator MURRAY—That is a wonderful story.

Mrs Nilsen—They are wonderful kids. I am lucky because they think the world of me too. They ring me every week. I can go and see them whenever I want. I just got another grandson from one of them. They get on marvellously with the children I had with George.

Senator MURRAY—Is your first husband still alive?

Mrs Nilsen—No.

Senator MURRAY—And your eldest child, I assume, would be middle-aged?

Mrs Nilsen—She just turned 49. She lives in Port Macquarie. They have all married well; they have all got on well. They said they had happy lives, and they would have had a lot happier lives than they would have had with me. He kicked my son around the room once until my son looked like just a bloody mess.

Senator MURRAY—Have a drink of water, Mrs Nilsen.

Mrs Nilsen—That son and I are very, very close. He lives near me. He comes every day. I look after his kids.

Senator MURRAY—Mrs Nilsen, the committee knows that there are still children and young people having the experiences you had.

Mrs Nilsen—Many.

Senator MURRAY—What, in your mind, is the most important thing the committee can ask the government to do?

Mrs Nilsen—I think they should be kept a better check on. I can remember once in Cookardinia—that is the last place I lived—that we saw one welfare officer. He came quite late at night-time. That is all we saw. I have got grandchildren now that I would like someone to go and check on. I cannot say anything; I cannot do anything. I keep the kids as much as I can. I reared them until they went to school. They are lovely kids. I have had them all weekend. Even if someone reports it, they do not really follow the story up with them a lot. They do not question the kids, and no kid will say anything against its parent—not one. If I said to one of my grandchildren, ‘Was your mother drunk last night?’ he would not say yes. He would just say, ‘Oh, no, Nanna, no. My Mum’s pretty.’ That is what they say. They do not want to know things like that. But children should be kept a better eye on. And so should a lot of the parents. A lot of them just do not know how to parent these days.

Senator MURRAY—I will leave my questions there. Thank you, Mrs Nilsen.

Senator McLUCAS—When I read your story and I got to the line ‘I also now have all my children back’, it was a relief for me, so it must be enormous relief for you. You said earlier that you would never go back to Bidura. Is there any value, in your experience, in reunions or getting together with other young girls, as they were then, to share those experiences?

Mrs Nilsen—A lot depends on whom they have been brought up with. I have one daughter: she is a prison supervisor in Queensland, married to the prison warden. After three years of being together, she is having hang-ups. She saw how Julia and Kala have been brought up with me and Frank she has suddenly got all jealous over it. She has not rung me for a year, but she talks to her sisters and says, ‘I’ll always leave the door open.’ She will send presents, which I do not understand, and I will not ring her and she will not ring me. But she wants to leave the door open. I still think the world of her, but she just cannot get over things either, because she was adopted and she blames me for it. But she would have had a hell of a life with me living in one room with a kerosene stove and a husband that kept on belting me and the boy. When he belted Frankie the last time he kicked him and kicked him and kicked him and Frank’s face was out here and his eyes were all bloodshot. He went and bought him a pair of dark glasses the next day so he could take him out for dinner. It is so hard to say because all circumstances are different. I do not think any child should stay in a violent home.

The orphanage that I was in—Bidura Home: you probably know it, I do not know—was not a nice little cottage style place where kids can go and feel safe. That is probably a better place than an institution—just a nice homely thing with just a couple of parents looking after, say, six kids. That would be all right. If the kid wants to leave when they are 16 or 18, fair enough. I left home at 16 because my foster father did not like me. Then when I was in my 30s, he turned around and told me I was nice. I cannot work it out. He did apologise. He did say he was sorry for the way he treated me when I was young.

Senator McLUCAS—Your foster mother obviously liked you.

Mrs Nilsen—If I had said anything about my foster father to anyone in the district, they would not have believed me. I know he tried to interfere with my foster sister. One night he even tried to get me into bed with him and I chuffed off. The first memory was enough for me. But nobody would have believed you had you said anything, because he was thought of as the gentleman of the district.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you, Mrs Nilsen.

Senator HUMPHRIES—In your submission you do not say a great deal about the time you spent in the orphanage. You mentioned a couple of things there. Was that run by a religious order?

Mrs Nilsen—No, it was government run.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What sort of mistreatment do you think you experienced there? You mentioned that you did not have a pillow, for example.

Mrs Nilsen—I do not know. When the other girls would run away and the police would bring them back, you would hear them getting belted. They had one room that they reckoned had ghosts in it from someone that had died there. It was in the way we never had enough to eat and the horrible clothes we had to wear—though every fortnight when we went to church we could get a different dress; we did not wear the uniform then, but it was first in first served there too. Our shoes came from a shed they would take us out to. It did not matter what they were, as long as they went on your feet. I just remember this big shed with lots of shoes in it. They just went on your feet and that was it. It was cold. It was just nothing. Every Saturday morning you used to have to drink Epsom salts. That was your medicine. On Friday night when I was leaving I was sitting outside Matron's office and nobody came to get me. I thought, 'I'm going to stay here tomorrow morning for the Epsom salts,' and I really cried because I thought I was going to have to drink it. Then a welfare officer came and picked me up and took me to Culcairn. That was all night on the train. She told everybody on the train that I was an orphan and I felt absolutely the pits the whole trip.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did you have the sense that there were people at the orphanage who cared about you?

Mrs Nilsen—There were too many kids there. There were so many of them that nobody had individual treatment. You were just thrown in there and left. You did not get visitors or anything like that—or we did not; I did not.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to ask you the question I asked the previous witness: what was the hardest thing you had to bear in your childhood? Was it the separation from your family or the mistreatment you received?

Mrs Nilsen—No. It was the nothingness: there was no love; there was no respect. There was nothing; you just existed. You did not know who you were. I did not even know my proper name until much later. I remember one time going to a place near Wagga where I was brought up—

Cookardinia—and a man said, ‘No. Her name is not Thelma, it is Delma.’ Then I found out again that it was not Delma, it was Thelma. I found out years later it was Delma. I had to legally change it because everything was under that other name. I did not know what my father’s name was; I knew nothing about who I was. I know now. I sent away for his certificate because I did not know whether he was alive or dead, and I got my own birth certificate back. I still know nothing and I am still trying to find out. I am still trying to find out who I am and whether or not I am part Aboriginal. That worries me. My kids all torment me. One of my girls is sending me a boomerang for a Christmas present. One said, ‘I’ll send her some corrugated iron and she can make a shack out of it.’ They are the things that I am getting all the time, but they are just having fun. But I am extremely lucky that I had George and I am extremely lucky that I got my children back. And they are all nice kids.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Nilsen.

[10.12 a.m.]

HART, Mr Brian, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mr Hart—That is correct.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity. Your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious about what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has your submission before it. I now invite you to make an opening presentation which will be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr Hart—First of all I want to say that, after 40-odd years, at long last somebody is listening to us. At long last we can talk about these events that happened to us. I think it might be best if we go to questions.

CHAIR—Okay. I will start off and then we will go to Senator Humphries. Have you been able to confront any of your abusers from the orphanages?

Mr Hart—No. After seeing the *Four Corners* program, ‘The Homies’, everything has been brought back. I am still having counselling; I have had counselling right up until now and on and off over the years.

CHAIR—When did you start to deal with this issue?

Mr Hart—When I first came out of the home, it was the sort of thing you could not talk about. At that time, who would listen to you? It has only been in the later years that people have been able to come forward and have their say because there are people listening at long last.

CHAIR—When did you want to say something?

Mr Hart—I could not say anything to my parents or to my mother. My grandfather and grandmother were Salvos. I could not say anything. Who would she believe? It has been pretty hard.

CHAIR—It has been pretty hard, yes.

Mr Hart—It is the sort of thing that is pretty hard to talk about.

CHAIR—I am sure it is. You said you saw the *Four Corners* program.

Mr Hart—Yes, that was in August.

CHAIR—Was it about that time that you decided to confront this?

Mr Hart—Yes. That is when it all started to come back. Put it this way: it is 40-odd years since I was in there. Most of the ones that were in charge would have passed on by now. I would say none of them are alive. But I still think they should be accountable for what they did.

CHAIR—Have you spoken to the Salvation Army at all?

Mr Hart—No, I have not. I just do not want anything to do with them. After this, I just want to forget them.

CHAIR—Yes. We have had similar contributions in Adelaide about the Salvos. Do you think they were aware of what was going on there?

Mr Hart—I do not think so. But, after seeing that program on *Four Corners*, it seems to be the whole thing—their whole pattern through the whole system—like your number and whistleblowing. It seemed that what the blokes said, when they interviewed them on the program, was exactly the same as what happened where I was. It seems to be their traits or the way that they handle things.

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Mr Hart, how old were you when you went to the Nedlands Boys Home?

Mr Hart—I was born in 1946. One of my immunisation cards is dated September 1956. So I would have been about 10.

Senator HUMPHRIES—When did you go to the Greenough convent?

Mr Hart—I went there first. I started off there.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How old were you then?

Mr Hart—I would have been about eight or nine. I was in what they called bubs—to start at school.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So you were at home with your family until you were about eight or nine.

Mr Hart—No. My mother was sick—she was always in and out of hospital. We were shunted from one relative to another. We were more or less all over the place.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The people who ran the Nedlands Boys Home were all staff in the Salvation Army, I assume.

Mr Hart—Yes. They were all officers; they all had uniforms.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How many boys were at the Nedlands Boys Home, do you think?

Mr Hart—I would say there would have been about 50. There would not have been any more because there were so many dormitories.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How many staff worked there, do you think?

Mr Hart—A few of them had their families with them. I do know their names, but I am not—you know.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Of the ones who had families with them, did you have any interaction with the children?

Mr Hart—No.

Senator HUMPHRIES—They were strictly separated?

Mr Hart—We saw them as the officers—their parents—the ones that were in charge. The only time we saw them was if they were going to school, if their parents worked. We never saw them. We were confined to certain areas. We were not allowed to go outside certain areas. That was it.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You mention that you have been receiving counselling. Where have you had that counselling?

Mr Hart—That is with Community Health.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is that a free service?

Mr Hart—Yes. At the moment I am on a pension. I cannot go back into the work force. I have had a bypass—that is through stress. When I was working, yes, I was paying for my own counselling. I was going to a psychiatrist.

Senator HUMPHRIES—As Senator Hutchins mentioned, we heard from a person in Adelaide who had also been in a Salvation Army institution in Victoria. Subsequent to our hearings, he went to speak to the Salvation Army about mistreatment he said he received at their hands. He reported that there was a positive reaction from the Salvation Army to that. They have in fact provided access to a lawyer at their expense to help him deal with those issues and related things. Would you consider doing the same thing in those circumstances?

Mr Hart—In my position, I do not want anything to do with the Salvation Army. I have been there. I just want to forget them. I am quite happy with the way that I am being counselled at the moment. I am quite happy with the person that is counselling me. I feel comfortable with that person.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you have any sense of sympathy for the people who were in Nedlands Boys Home that were looking after you—the officers in the Salvation Army? Do you think that they were victims of the system or do you think that individually they were guilty of neglect or a poor attitude towards the children that they cared for?

Mr Hart—I would say that some of them, when they were dishing out the punishment, went overboard. I think a lot of it was uncalled for.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So there were personal failings on the part of those officers.

Mr Hart—Yes. There was one officer there who had a bit of a heart, really. I would say the others went overboard—and there was no need for it. If you were going to be punished, you wished it would be a certain one who was giving it to you because he did not whale into you like the others did.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What would you like to see this committee do about these issues? What recommendation would you like to see us make to deal with people in a position like yours?

Mr Hart—I think they should be accountable, so that it does not happen again. I think places like that should be screened. When my brother and I first went into there, I felt as if everything was taken away from me—my dignity and everything. You were not a name; you were just a number. I have had to live with that all my life.

Senator McLUCAS—You said earlier that you are happy with the counselling that you have now. We have talked to other care leavers who have told us that it has been hard for them to find a good counsellor; that there are some who are better and who understand the experience that you have had and some who cannot. Have you had that experience also?

Mr Hart—Not really. I find that the one that is counselling me now is very understanding. You have to feel comfortable with that person. It is very hard for us to trust people. I cannot trust people now. It is very hard.

Senator McLUCAS—So it takes a while to build up a relationship?

Mr Hart—It does, yes. I have been going to this person for about three years.

Senator McLUCAS—You said that you were paying for counselling when you were working.

Mr Hart—Yes. I was going to a psychiatrist then. They were pretty expensive.

Senator McLUCAS—When you started receiving counselling, in your own mind was it as a result of your period of time in the orphanage? Did you identify that in your own mind or did you look for support for other reasons?

Mr Hart—It was pretty hard to understand what was happening to me and why. Now it is a lot easier; I know why I am like I am. The counselling has brought a lot to the surface.

Senator McLUCAS—How old were you when you first started receiving counselling?

Mr Hart—I was working for Westrail. That was through the government. You should have a copy of the information about that person. I was receiving counselling from that person on and off. I found that he was pretty good. Then all of a sudden Westrail stopped the counselling. They said, ‘You will not get any counselling from that person.’ So I returned to private enterprise and got different people. It is pretty hard. You cannot just go to another person and start again. It is pretty hard to build up the confidence.

Senator McLUCAS—Are you in touch with CLAN or one of the other support groups?

Mr Hart—No. I think I put it in my submission that I have often wondered how most of the blokes got on that were there when I was there. I often wonder how they are going.

Senator McLUCAS—So there has never been a reunion or anything like that?

Mr Hart—No. They are probably like I am. They are probably loners and cannot trust anybody.

Senator McLUCAS—Do you think a reunion would be helpful for you?

Mr Hart—I think it would. At least you could find out how they are getting on. Maybe it would be a help for all of us.

Senator McLUCAS—You shared time. Thank you, Mr Hart.

Mr Hart—No worries.

Senator MURRAY—Attached to your submission is your partner’s observations about living with you. She says:

I have been Brian Mervyn Hart’s partner for the past five years and the going has been pretty tough generally.

This is a very good encapsulation of an experience we have come across in numerous other submissions—that is, hurting a child not only hurts the adult but also affects their relationships with their children, friends, employers and so on. Knowing how clearly she sees things and having the counselling you are having, which you say is effective, do you find that your ability to relate to others has improved or that your relationships have improved or has there been no change? I ask the question because this is typical of institutionalised children, particularly men. Your partner also states:

Brian has been married several times, has had numerous failed relationships ...

Mr Hart—That is correct.

Senator MURRAY—As a combination of those two things, do you find that your own ability to relate is improving?

Mr Hart—Yes, because since this has all come to the surface it is a lot easier for her to understand me now. She knows and she can understand me. Before, she could not. It was worrying her, the way I was sometimes. Now she understands more.

Senator MURRAY—Is the counselling always just one to one or does she come with you?

Mr Hart—She has been a few times; I have asked her to come along. When the *Four Corners* program came on, I asked her to come in with me then. She was pleased that she did come, because it helped her a hell of a lot to understand more.

Senator MURRAY—I might say, just reading it, that she seems a pretty good person to me.

Mr Hart—She is. It is a shame she could not be here today. She had to go to Ireland. Her mother is passing on—she is not the best—and so she got called over there suddenly.

Senator MURRAY—I am asking these questions this way because it is self-evident to me and probably to the other members of the committee that specialised focused counselling services which also have continuity of people—because continual change in personnel has a problem attached to it—are desirable. But they also have to improve things for people attached to the person who is hurt, because of the knock-on effects. Your experience is that that is an effect of good counselling.

Mr Hart—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Hart, one of the things I have really struggled with in the treatment of children is that, while to an extent you can understand people running institutions having weird ideas about discipline, there is basic commonsense. Why weren't you allowed to wear shoes in winter—in Perth, for God's sake?

Mr Hart—I cannot answer that myself. Even now, I have trouble wearing shoes. I wear shorts all year round; I just cannot help it.

Senator MURRAY—The other kids at the school had shoes—except for the kids coming from the home.

Mr Hart—None of the kids in the home were allowed to wear shoes—only when we went out in public, believe it or not. That was strange, yes.

Senator MURRAY—So you were never given any explanation for that.

Mr Hart—No. Maybe they thought we would lose them or whatnot; I do not know. I thought it was strange, myself. We always ended up with stone blisters or you would stub your toe.

Senator MURRAY—There is something that I am going to ask you that I want you to think carefully about. I will give you a bit of background. When this committee examined the child migrant area, some members went to Canada, where institutionalisation was a major issue—the so-called home children there. It was documented that large numbers of children were murdered in institutions, or that manslaughter occurred. Murder is a deliberate act; manslaughter is a

consequential act. I have read a number of submissions which mentioned deaths which were not properly explained. I want to ask you about this, and I will read it back to you so it is clear. The submission says:

One of many incidents that springs to mind whilst I was in the care of the Salvation Army at Nedlands, is that one of the boys in my dormitory was rather delicate and frail and we had a visit from the polio van. We were all lined up and given a needle. Subsequently this boy went to the toilet and was eventually found dead in the toilet.

Then you go on to talk about the effect on you.

Mr Hart—That is correct.

Senator MURRAY—When I read that what I imagine is that this child had a negative reaction to the medicine and, as a consequence of those complications, he died. Do you know anything about the circumstances? Was a doctor called? Was there an inquiry or a coroner's inquest? Do you know anything at all?

Mr Hart—No. What happened was that he was found in the toilet and at that time an ambulance came and that was all we knew. We were asked if we wanted to go to the funeral.

Senator MURRAY—And no explanation was ever given?

Mr Hart—No, nothing was said.

Senator MURRAY—I am not sure the committee could follow it up, but for the record: do you remember the boy's full name?

Mr Hart—No.

Senator MURRAY—Do you remember his first name?

Mr Hart—No, but he was in the dormitory; he slept in the bed next to me.

Senator MURRAY—Were there any other occasions of unaccounted for deaths?

Mr Hart—No, that is the only one that happened while I was there. That is the only one. I know he used to go to an outside school; he went to a special school. Some of the kids went to special schools.

Senator MURRAY—Okay. You talk about bullying.

Mr Hart—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Were the older kids bullying the younger kids?

Mr Hart—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—And that was right across the institution?

Mr Hart—Yes; there were certain ones you stayed away from.

Senator MURRAY—I see you became a shunter.

Mr Hart—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—My understanding of a shunter's job is that it is fairly lonely—you are on your own a lot.

Mr Hart—I was out at Forrestfield marshalling yard. That is a pretty big complex.

Senator MURRAY—Yes, but much of the job is done on your own, isn't it?

Mr Hart—No, you always had somebody with you; you always had your crew. You had the engine driver and fireman and, if you worked in the yard, there were five of you in the crew.

Senator MURRAY—Again there is a purpose behind my question. Some of the consequences of institutionalisation have been that boys and girls have either wanted to go into the forces or somewhere which is institutional itself or they have become loners and tried to find jobs where they are alone as much as possible. Did that affect your choice of work?

Mr Hart—It was shiftwork; you could class that as being lonely, because you went to work at odd hours when there was nobody else around—at 4 o'clock in the morning and 2 o'clock and start at midnight and go through to eight.

Senator MURRAY—This is the last question from me: has telling your story in this manner, being upfront and open about an awful time in your life and its effects on you, done you any good personally? What did you get out of this process?

Mr Hart—Yes, it has eased a hell of a lot. It has given me a chance to have my say. All these years, it has been bottled up. So, yes, it has been a relief to have my say at long last.

Senator MURRAY—If I can speak for the committee, I would close by expressing our thanks to your partner for giving us a very clear picture of what the effect is on somebody who lives with somebody who has got problems arising from institutionalisation.

Mr Hart—Yes, she has been very good for me. I do trust her. It was very hard at first, but I do now.

CHAIR—I have one final question: boy No. 36—

Mr Hart—That is me.

CHAIR—Do you recall 35 and 37 even to this day?

Mr Hart—No. It is strange: when I went into the railways my locker number was 36, so I could not forget it.

CHAIR—And you never put anything in it? Thank you very much, Mr Hart.

Mr Hart—No worries, thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 10.39 a.m. to 10.59 a.m.

MANN, Mr Barry, (Private capacity)

MANN, Mr Douglas, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have both received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mr B. Mann—Yes.

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. We have your submissions. I now invite you to make an opening presentation if you would like to do so.

Mr B. Mann—I would like to hear your questions. I am not only talking for myself today; I am talking for a lot of kids that have not come in here, because a lot of us are quite angry about it, including me—fuming, really. The whole system, right from when we were children in the orphanage, has let us down: governments, government institutions and child welfare. Everything, including our human rights, has been denied us. Because of the upbringing that we have had, all these problems go with you for the rest of your life so that when you run into problems you do not get access to the law. You have got nobody to see and nobody to try to get help for you. When you go and see a politician you are just out the door—they take no notice and there is no help. That has happened to me on several occasions in my life on a few very serious matters. We get no help from any of you.

What is the child welfare system? I have never seen it. I spent 10 years in that joint and never saw any of those people. I never saw a dentist and the only time I ever saw a doctor was when I poisoned myself eating wild pears and when they gave us the needle in the arm for polio. That is all in 10 years, mate. Nobody gave us anything in that place. We were brutalised, victimised and worthless. I have got to be careful I do not swear. We were pretty well knocked about.

It even happened with Mum and Nanna, when they would come up. There was an incident where we were actually working in the rockery and I was on the pick and my younger brother walked up behind me and it stuck in his head. I got thrashed to within an inch of my life for that, and I showed my mother and my grandmother all the strap marks from my ankles to my face and there was nothing we could do—you were not allowed to say anything. When my sister got sick she was sick for weeks and all her joints swelled up and she had trouble walking, but she still had to march everywhere. Then, one day, she just disappeared. Nobody told us she was sick and nobody told us she was in a hospital at death's door—nobody told us anything.

That has continued. We have all these mobs who reckon that they help the underprivileged, and the human rights commission. Where are these people? Who are they? Where do they hide? We have never seen any of them. You see it in the newspapers all the time—they fly them around and they spend \$40 million in legal fees on people coming here illegally. We got nothing. We never got anything. That is it.

I do not want to be patronised. We were patronised as kids in the orphanage and now, as adults, on some very serious issues, we are patronised by politicians who do not do anything for us—it is just, 'Psht, out the door with you, you lowlife.' That is how it continues. When we get out of these orphanages—where you destroyed our families, you broke us up, you divided us as children so that we had no bonding with our siblings—we have nothing behind us. We are left to every parasite on the planet because we are vulnerable. People take advantage of us because we are in a very vulnerable situation. That seems to be the pattern.

I am absolutely amazed at the pattern of systematic abuse that was going on in all these joints. I thought it went on only in Parkerville, but it went on everywhere. Where have the government and the institutions under the government been? You are legislators. Why don't you follow-up on all these people? It is easy to make a law but somebody has got to follow it up to see that what you people spend a lot of time on legislating for and trying to get right is occurring. But there is nobody out there following it up.

Have you ever been to the dole office? That is an experience in itself. There would not be a numbskull down there that has experienced any of our experiences who could relate to us or our problems. Instead, they write derogatory remarks about you because you have got the audacity to ask them for an explanation on something that you are worried about or that you are not clear on. So you dare not ask them something. It is a matter of: 'This is the curriculum, fill this out, out the door—that is your lot.' That is what has happened, and that is what is happening now.

For the kids in the streets nothing has changed. The systematic abuse is still going on. All these institutions that claim they are there to help the children are only helping themselves. They are not helping the children. I think a lot of those institutions do not have people in there who have experienced or have any understanding of the systematic abuse to be able to relate to you; but they have all got answers. You have people who I call rat tamers—psychologists. How could a rat tamer tell me about the abuse that has been inflicted on me? You tell me how he could possibly tell me that he knows about the abuse that has been inflicted on me. He would not have any idea; he would not know what day of the week it was.

It is not about sending us to rat tamers or to those types of people, because they do not understand. It is one thing to give you a sympathetic ear but it is another thing to understand the complexity of the problems, because the complexities go on in your family. For instance, I and my brother and sister love each other very dearly but, because of the ingrained shame that is in our lives, we do not impose ourselves on one another. We do not want anybody to know that we were ever in those joints. We try to avoid it—we all do. The only time as a family that we have ever discussed anything about that was in Senator Murray's office. I am 61 years of age, and we have never talked about the abuse that my brother suffered or about the atrocities against my sister and me.

I know that, when I came out into this wide world out here and was getting jobs, it was like I had run away to the circus. A lot of kids think about running away to circuses and stuff like that. My goodness—some of the lowest forms of life that ever crawled across the planet were in those places. A lot of the types of people that were there were very similar to me—dysfunctional, dispossessed, no-hopers, drunks and lechers. It was shocking.

Melbourne was an experience. It is in my submission. I will not go into that. The reason that I have kept a lot of things private is that the pain and the distress that has been on my family is enough without that sort of stuff. Most of us have tried to deal with things in our own ways. Doug's wife Dorothy, for instance, cannot compute why we are not worried about birthdays and Christmases and stuff like that. It means nothing to me. Has it ever meant anything to you?

Mr D. Mann—No.

Mr B. Mann—It just means absolutely nothing. Although we give good Christmases and stuff for our children, it means absolutely nowt for us, because we have never had or experienced it. Things like birthday parties and birthday cakes just do not come into the equation. This is the thing. A lot of people cannot understand these types of things and how they actually affect you. You are not doing it on purpose because you want to be an idiot; it is just automatic. We do not get Christmas cards from one another, because it is just absolutely meaningless.

It has had a profound effect not only on our immediate family but also on our children. It is having a huge effect on my grandchildren. I have just spent a night and a morning with something else to do with my grandchildren, and we have been trying to get help. But, again, we get all this patronising nonsense. You get the ring-around and the run-around. We have a little boy who is an absolutely wonderful little man, but he has a lot of energy and mischievousness. He cannot talk, and he is maybe five—would he be five, the little fellow?

Mr D. Mann—About five.

Mr B. Mann—And you still cannot get anybody. The situation there is that my son works 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week. He is up at six o'clock in the morning cleaning the house and the babies and feeding them. He is doing it all. We cannot get any help. As to all of these mobs that wrote the other day calling me a homey and things like that, by gee, they were lucky I was not around, because it really got me fired up. I am not homey. I am a kid who grew up in Parkerville children's orphanage. That is who I am. I am not a homey. I do not relate to that. A lot of the kids who are not here today and who I grew up with cannot relate to that at all. The mob who brought that over here ought to take it back across the border with them, because, to me, it was somebody else trying to put another slight on us and trying to pigeonhole us once again. We do not want that.

We have a huge problem in dealing with people in institutions. That is why we have had problems when we go down to the dole office, which is an experience I would not recommend to my worst enemy, because it is full of imbeciles. These people are supposed to be educated, but they are only educated in the curriculum. But I tell you what, outside that curriculum, most of them would not be able to find their way home. That has been my experience. That is all I have to say.

Mr D. Mann—We were put into a home due to the circumstance that my father was involved with an influential family. My mother was put into a situation where she had to work to look after us. She paid money every week or fortnight for us to be looked after. I was 18 months old when I was put in there in 1947. I was born in 1945. I was in ‘baby land’ until I was about four years old. I was looked after by a lady who loved children; she was the only person in that home whom I ever received any love and attention from. I was shipped down to St Gabriel’s. My sister was in Padbury, which is right next door. We were split up as soon as we got there. Instead of being held together in one place, we were split up; we never got to interact with each other. My brother was already in St Gabriel’s home. I never knew my sister when I was in the home. The only time I got to see my sister in the home was when mum came up or when something special was on.

In a way, over the years, that disintegrated us. We do not see each other at all, we do not interact as a family and we have never had a loving, caring family or relationships among any of us. When I was in St Gabriel’s I was afraid of the dark and would wet the bed. Every time I wet the bed, my face would be rubbed in the wet sheets and I would be thrown under a cold shower. While I was under that shower I would be belted with a strap and would scream my lungs out. I used to come out with red marks all over my body where I had been hit with the strap. Today, when I am almost 59, with anything to do with cold water, I get hypothermic. Those beltings and cold water have affected me. I cannot go for a swim. I cannot have a cold shower. Even if it is 150 degrees I cannot have a cold shower, because I get hypothermic. When I get out I am shivering with cold and I turn blue. People look at me like I am an idiot, like there is something wrong with me. That is one effect from the beltings for wetting the bed.

Like one of the other gentlemen said, we never had shoes and we had to walk to school. We would walk in a group and if we were late for school we would all get a belting. The older person in charge of us would get a belting and, if we were the ones responsible for being late for school, he would take it out on us. So we used to get beltings all the time. In freezing cold weather in winter we used to get chilblains on our feet. I used to be picked up by the scruff of the neck and run downhill on a gravel road all the way to school, which was 1½ to two miles away. It was the same on the way home. I would run most of the way home and would be crying all the time.

The treatment that I received made me, in a way, over my life, a victim. I became a lot like a victim because I retreated into myself as I grew older. Eventually when I left the home I had never lived under the same roof as my sister. I met my father when I was 13 years old. I never saw him, due to his involvement with this influential family. That influential family had a profound effect on my family up until the death of my father, which was about three years ago. He did everything possible to deny me my name. They did not want to acknowledge that he was even my father.

Mr B. Mann—They put the queen’s counsel onto us, mate.

Mr D. Mann—The queen’s counsel forced us to be in the home in the first place. They did everything possible to deny us having anything more to do with our father. It split us up completely. We have never been like a family. The only time I ever really bonded with people was when I got called up for national service in 1965. I went to Vietnam. The people I bonded with were the members of the platoon that I was in overseas. That ended on 17 February 1967,

when most of them were killed and wounded. I have never had friends since. I have no friends. I have lived a very lonely life. I do not mix with people. I had a drinking problem for quite a while. I used to just sit by myself and drink. It is only the last couple of years that I go to an Anzac Day service and stay and have a few beers with people afterwards, because I basically still do not mix even with other veterans.

I am a married man. I met my wife when I was 38 in 1981-82. We got married and have two daughters. I have spoiled them, because I wanted to make sure my kids never, ever went through anything that I went through. If it weren't for my wife and children, I would have been dead, because I have tried several times to commit suicide. I have grown up with low self-esteem. I think there is a word for it—something to do with your character. You know, you are lacking character. I cannot think of the word that they use, but there is a word to describe me. I have been described in my military service as somebody who lacks character. That is because of the victimisation that I suffered from Parkerville and it turned me into a victim and I have been a victim all my life. I have been assaulted over the years and I have never done anything about it. I have never retaliated. I have just accepted in my mind that I am a victim and that is what happens. I am not a coward. I am not frightened of people, but it just reverts to my childhood.

Mr B. Mann—The only thing he is frightened of is telling me who belted him because he knows I will go and get him. That is the only thing he is frightened of. Because I would go and get him.

Mr D. Mann—Senator Murray would know the chap who wrote a book called *The Noisy Mansions*. He passed away recently. Have you heard of that book?

Senator MURRAY—I have heard of the book but I do not remember the name.

Mr D. Mann—It is about homes and institutions. I cannot think of the chap's name, but he passed away in the last three months, I think. He was a director of homes; he was in charge of a lot of homes. In regard to my sister, in that book he mentioned a child who died at Parkerville, I think, from rheumatic fever. That is what my sister suffered from all her life—that very same complaint—because we never saw a doctor. When Barry hit me in the head, I never saw a doctor. They just wrapped a towel around my head and that was it. The only medical treatment you got was from an old nun who still lived at Parkerville. She was the last nun there because all the others were forced to leave in 1947.

Mr B. Mann—That was the only connection that any of us had with the Lord; it did not come from any others—definitely not from the church.

Mr D. Mann—I cannot think of that chap's name. I wrote it down here somewhere. I have photographs here of our clothing for normal wear. Most times we were barefooted and wore shorts. As one of the other gentlemen said, you never had long trousers; you always wore shorts—summer or winter—and a sleeveless jumper. That was the uniform. A chap who now operates a farm, who has had publicity recently, submitted a story for the Battye Library in which he mentioned beltings, but he has not mentioned anything like that since. This book is in the Battye library and it is about the Parkerville Children's Home. A family friend used to be in the Parkerville Children's Home as a youngster when the nuns were there. He said that they never had beltings and they were all well looked after. But when I was there, the government had

taken it over and the nuns had all been forced out, and things had changed. The house parents, like me, were all ex-military people who should not have been involved with kids. They did not know how to handle children; they treated you appallingly. You were always hungry.

Mr B. Mann—Actually, we are the second generation of our family that have come out of orphanages because of wars. Three generations of our family have fought for this joint, and two of us have come out of orphanages to do it. So this is a long and very complex thing that you are dealing with. You are not just dealing with abuse—it has been systematic. Any child in any institution, whether or not they are being mistreated, should not be in that joint in the first place.

Senator MURRAY—Are you saying that your father was in an orphanage as well?

Mr B. Mann—No, our uncles.

Senator MURRAY—On your mother's side or on your father side?

Mr D. Mann—Our mother's side.

Mr B. Mann—Nearly every male in our family, on both sides of our family, has served in the military for this country. My grandfather fought in Pozieres and was bayoneted twice in Pozieres, and he had nightmares and problems dealing with that situation. His boys were put in an orphanage because, again, there was a lot of anger, a lot of violence and that. They came out of the orphanage and went to war. One of our uncles is quite famous—he was in the Z Force. Have you heard of the Z Force? This is the sort of thing that happened with all the people in our family.

Mr D. Mann—There were two members in the Z Force, from my mother's side of the family and from my father's side of the family.

Mr B. Mann—You will find this from this Senate inquiry, and it was the same for a lot of the English and the Maltese children: these things happened in war times. It amazes me that politicians send people away to fight and they do not know the consequences for their families. I have written poetry about it, but it is pretty cutting. I could not say it in public; a lot of my poetry is pretty powerful stuff. I actually wrote a poem for this thing today. But after reading an article in the paper the other day by some clan mob, or whoever it was who wrote it, I did not bring the poem in because I was infuriated. I am being pigeonholed once again.

CHAIR—Doug, do you have some photographs you would like to show us?

Mr D. Mann—Yes, I have some typical photographs here. This photograph is of me and a kid named Bookie Alcott taken outside St Gabriel's cottage.

CHAIR—No shoes on?

Mr D. Mann—No shoes. That was our ordinary uniform for school.

CHAIR—What year was that photograph taken?

Mr D. Mann—I would have been about seven, probably eight.

CHAIR—What year would that have been?

Mr D. Mann—I was there from '47.

CHAIR—So that is 1954?

Mr D. Mann—It would be around about '54 or '53. The next photograph is of a special occasion—they are my usual clothes for those. I have two photographs where it is the same. That was my grandmother. Whenever the home knew your relatives were coming up they would try to see that you had shoes on because it was a special occasion. They would sometimes make sure you had sandals on and had clean clothing.

CHAIR—Who are the ladies in these photographs?

Mr D. Mann—One of them is my mother. My sister is there, and Barry and me.

Mr B. Mann—And grandma.

Mr D. Mann—And my grandmother. The eldest lady is my grandmother.

Senator MURRAY—On your mother's side?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

Mr B. Mann—Yes, our mother's mother. We have had no contact with any member of my father's side of the family.

Mr D. Mann—This other photo was taken not long after I was up there. I was about three.

CHAIR—Doug, were you in the institution in Parkerville when this photo I am holding was taken?

Mr D. Mann—Yes, that was taken in the park opposite.

CHAIR—Who is in the photograph?

Mr D. Mann—Me and my brother, Barry. It was taken in the park opposite.

CHAIR—That is Barry is standing behind, is it? With those ears?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

CHAIR—That is you standing behind with the ears, Barry?

Mr B. Mann—With the big ears? Yes, mate.

Mr D. Mann—The next photograph is one taken at the local school, when I went to the primary school down in Parkerville itself. It was the public school. I had three photos taken there over three years, and I was wearing the same jacket in all of them, because you wore that jacket for photos only. The next photo is a school photograph taken for the local school. The next one is of our school football team. The children in that who came from Parkerville were all barefoot.

CHAIR—Yes, I am just trying to see that.

Mr D. Mann—The ones with football boots on were all local Parkerville district children.

CHAIR—Are there any Aboriginal children here?

Mr D. Mann—No.

Mr B. Mann—Yes.

Mr D. Mann—I think there is one part-Aboriginal boy. What was his name?

Mr B. Mann—Two boys.

Mr D. Mann—What was his name? Alfie Dale?

CHAIR—Do you remember most of the names of these boys?

Mr D. Mann—No.

Mr B. Mann—I am still in contact with many of them today, but Doug is not.

Mr D. Mann—I am in the next photograph on the left-hand side as you look at the picture, in the back row.

CHAIR—Yes, up the back.

Mr D. Mann—The next photograph is of some of the girls who were in the home. One of them there is a lady who was a friend of my mother's. Am I allowed to say the name of the girl I am pointing to?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr D. Mann—Her name is Clare Boswell. Clare and I were the two youngest children in baby land. We were both there at the same time. I cannot remember the names of the other girls, but she was my first ever girlfriend, and I often saw her over the years. She passed away when she was about 29 years of age. I saw her a few times here in WA and in New South Wales.

CHAIR—These little girls are dressed up.

Mr D. Mann—Yes, they are dressed up like it was a special occasion.

CHAIR—Is that why they have got shoes on?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

CHAIR—Or did girls generally have shoes and boys did not?

Mr D. Mann—No, the only time we had shoes was for special occasions.

CHAIR—So the girls never had shoes either?

Mr D. Mann—No shoes, no.

Senator MURRAY—Doug, we have found that a lot of the children—they are adults now—who were in these institutions went through the same experiences, yet once they left the institution the relationship between them ended. They did not remain friends. That was not always the case but it was very common. You have said that you have no friends.

Mr D. Mann—I do not have any friends.

Senator MURRAY—So didn't you retain a relationship with any of those kids whom you were with for so long and who went through the same experiences as you?

Mr D. Mann—No.

Senator MURRAY—Can you explain why that happens?

Mr D. Mann—I do not really know why; probably because I was so young when I went there. As I said, I was only 18 months old when I went there and I have moved around. I know that one of them—Clare Boswell's brother—got called up for national service. In the last eight to 10 years there was an article in a newspaper about a person with the same name who had been found in distress for some reason. I believe that was Clare Boswell's brother. Another young lad—his brother was in the photograph with the football team—in the last 15 years was charged with murder.

Senator MURRAY—None of us here have psychological or psychiatric training—at least I do not think any of us do. There is an odd contrast between institutionalised life, where you do not end up with friends, and Army life, where you end up being mates often forever. In both cases you go through very tough times together and you share a tough experience together. One seems to build friendships; the other seems not to. I am trying to understand whether the consequence of treating a child badly is that they become very lonely and cannot, even though they are with other children, sustain a relationship.

Mr B. Mann—Can I add something to that?

Senator MURRAY—Yes.

Mr B. Mann—I understand where you are coming from when you compare the two relationships: one of military service and one of kids like us who were in orphanages. When a lot

of the kids left the orphanages, especially the kids who were wards of the state, as I think they were called, they were shipped out to farms, so you never, ever saw them again. That happened to me. I ended up on a farm, living in a little tin shed and working as slave labour. I have a friend now, whom Marilyn got to go and see, and Rolly was on a farm for donkey's years and did not get paid. So you are totally isolated, and that is probably the reason.

Mr D. Mann—I also have a newspaper clipping here which shows how you normally dressed. That is normal clothing for children. Barry's name was 'Dopey'!

Mr B. Mann—I do not need reminding! I see the funny side of that, because when I went to high school they used to call me 'the professor'!

CHAIR—We have a cut-out here from a newspaper that shows four boys with no shoes on, nicknamed after the well-known dwarfs in *Snow White*. These children pose for their picture at the Parkerville home. They are from left to right: Dopey, Sleepy, Happy and Grumpy. Doug, are you in this photograph?

Mr D. Mann—No. Barry is about six or seven. He is three years older than I am. I liked my food. I was a little fatso, a little slob. I used to eat anything and everything. I used to volunteer at times to work in the kitchen, because you could never get enough to eat. I used to try to get the breakfast pot in the morning. We would have, say, porridge or bread and milk together. I would always try to get the pot, so I could scrape the pot clean and eat all the thick stuff that had settled on the bottom.

CHAIR—What was it like when you went into the army? Were you still hungry?

Mr D. Mann—No, because I had plenty to eat when I was in the army.

CHAIR—So you did not—

Mr D. Mann—No. I ended up on mess duty, but I never volunteered for it. Military style volunteering is, 'You! Do this!' I ended up being involved with pots: washing pots from 9 o'clock in the morning until 9 o'clock at night. We never went up to the main hall for the main meal of the day. I used to try and get the jelly pot because a thick skin of jelly used to collect on the bottom. I used to scrape all that clean—and the custard pot. I used to scrape all the skin off the custard and eat it. I used to eat other kids' scraps. I was always hungry because I never got enough to eat.

CHAIR—Can I ask about your education. Where did you go to school while you were at Parkerville?

Mr D. Mann—At Parkerville, I initially started school in the home itself. It was a preschool type of thing. I went from there down to the Parkerville district school.

CHAIR—Was that the local public school?

Mr D. Mann—Yes, the public school. I did a year's schooling at Cargill Street school in East Victoria Park.

CHAIR—Was that another primary school?

Mr D. Mann—Yes; a public school in East Victoria Park. That was when I left the home. I did a year at Kent Street Senior High School. I left in 1959, just after I turned 14.

CHAIR—How many years of secondary school would you have attended? Two, three or four?

Mr D. Mann—One year, probably. My sister never ever went to high school. She got into Parkerville. She never had an education. She never went to high school.

CHAIR—Was that the same experience for you as well, Barry?

Mr B. Mann—I had basically no education whatsoever. When you got to, say, high school age they used to move you. They moved me away from Douglas, from St Gabriel's up to St Nicholas's. That was when I got to high school age. I used to get as many floggings up there as I did in the orphanage because I was not being fulfilled. I think the only thing anybody I went to school with would say about me is that I draw a good picture on the blackboard, out of a book. This bloke—he is now a multimillionaire—gave me a book. I drew the picture on the blackboard but I put the singing teacher's head on it, and I got a flogging.

CHAIR—I will ask you this separately. When you went to these schools—it sounds like you moved to three or four schools, Doug—were you on the same level as the other kids?

Mr D. Mann—No.

CHAIR—Could you understand, read or do arithmetic?

Mr D. Mann—I was basically down a class. The only things I was good at at school were spelling and composition. With the beltings and that, I did not mix with kids. I was afraid all the time so I started reading books. I used to read lots of books. I could always remember a whole paragraph or chapter about a book. In composition I would write that whole chapter, about the book. That was when I was quite young. But today I cannot even write a letter.

CHAIR—You cannot what? I am sorry.

Mr D. Mann—I cannot sit down with a piece of paper and write a letter. I will sit all day. I experienced it in Vietnam as well. I was told that my mother was concerned, because I would not write home. I was told by my commanding officer, 'You will sit there until you write a letter to your mother.' I sat there for a whole day and all I wrote was: 'Dear Mum'. I signed it at the bottom: 'Your loving son, Douglas', and posted it. I was never able to write, yet at school I used to get 100 per cent for spelling and at least 90 per cent for composition. I could remember all the different passages from the different books I used to read. I used to like kids adventure books, like Biggles.

CHAIR—You said you were in a class below what you should have been in. Is that right?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

CHAIR—From your recollection, was that generally the case for kids from Parkerville?

Mr D. Mann—I do not know about other kids, but I was in the year below the class I normally would have been in.

CHAIR—Barry, was that the case for you too?

Mr B. Mann—Yes. When my job was criminally taken away from me, they gave me the run-around. They took me to a workers rehabilitation centre for interviews and they sent me up to TAFE. They gave me an aptitude test and about a week later I got a letter asking me to go and see them. I went to see someone who was pretty high up in the place. He told me that I was in the bottom three per cent of the population scholastically. I was quite shocked, because I had done the block work on the very building we were sitting in. I said to him: ‘Gee, I had better get out of here. Maybe the joint will fall down on us!’ And I did; I bolted. It left a bad taste in my mouth. You think you are doing all right and then all of a sudden you hear that. They had graphs that I did not really understand, but they did go through them. I was in the bottom three per cent of the population, which is Aborigines and a lot of people from orphanages. Most of the guys I have contact with now have faced huge problems scholastically.

CHAIR—And they like to be isolated, do they?

Mr B. Mann—Yes, most of us like to be very isolated. It is something that I cannot really explain. I live in a little town which would be lucky to have 50 people, yet four of us came out of institutions.

CHAIR—How do you know that the other three came from institutions? Is there something that you have picked up in them—or they have picked up in you—by which you know they are from an institution?

Mr B. Mann—One particular fellow that I got Marilyn to see, somebody else told me about. I went down and introduced myself to him. I was living on a block of land in a very small campervan. A bathroom would be bigger than it. Doug knows what I have lived in. I lived in it for nearly 15 years. A bathroom would be bigger. It was seven feet six inches by 11 feet four inches; that is the area I lived in for a lot of years. But I have now moved into a house and, I tell you, a shower every day and a toilet and so on is amazing; it really is. It is like living in luxury. It makes such a difference.

I have been quite happy with my living situation over the years, but very unhappy about my circumstance. I think you tend to keep to yourself. There are two Australians and two who are English, like my friend. He was brought up in Swan Boys Home and he has not even got Australian citizenship. These are the sorts of problems that are out there. He has not even got Australian citizenship, yet we have brutalised him in our country. We have treated him like a dog, we have ripped him off and he has nothing.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You both mentioned not knowing things that were going on. Your sister was taken away and you were not told what was happening to her. Do you think that was because the people who ran the home just did not care whether or not you knew? Or was there a

systematic denial of information coming to you in order to keep you under control and keep you in the dark and make you compliant?

Mr B. Mann—I know where you are coming from, mate. That is a good question, because that is one thing that you were denied. It was basically the old adage: you were seen and not heard. If you did stand up and speak up, you were flattened real quick. That was all through the orphanage. When kids got to St Nicholas's they were getting up to high school age. In those days you could leave school at 14. The child welfare department would come and grab them and that was it. Nobody said that Billy, Tommy or Mary were going to so and so; you were gone—nothing. There were no words, were there?

Mr. D. Mann—From my perspective, I did not really know my sister. Even though there are two photographs there, I really did not know my sister. I can honestly say I never really knew my sister; I did not really interact with her as my sister. I never had a family relationship. That is why today I have spoiled my own kids. I am lucky; I have two daughters. I started late and, as I said, if it were not for my wife I would have been dead years ago. I have two daughters and I have tried to make sure that they did not experience things that I experienced. I was unemployed for up to five years when my children were born. I spent five years full time with both my kids and I always bought them toys and spoiled them. I would take them out to shopping centres and I felt like my head was out to here like a football, like I was the only father in the world, because I went out with my own children. I made sure they were all dressed up and really clean and tidy—just like little princesses—which was the opposite of what I experienced.

Senator MURRAY—Doug and Barry, just explain Parkerville to us so that we can understand how it was configured. You mentioned 30 kids per cottage.

Mr. D. Mann—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—You mentioned baby land and you mentioned St Gabriel's and Padbury. How big was it? How was it structured? How many kids were there? How many cottages? I have all those sorts of questions.

Mr D. Mann—I cannot remember exactly how many cottages were there. As you came up the hill, you had the main administration building, which used to be at the school, on your right-hand side. It was a brick building. That was where the administration was, and there you would do your schooling or dancing lessons and things like that.

Senator MURRAY—So they could not teach you to read and write but they did teach you to dance?

Mr D. Mann—We were taught how to dance, but, as I said before, there was only one good person who gave us love and affection. That was Miss Holt. That lady was a real angel to all the children. She treated every kid as if they were her own, and she herself had a child.

Mr B. Mann—This particular lady traversed from Fairbridge Farm School to Sister Kate's and to Parkerville. I was a pallbearer at her funeral. She was the most wonderful person.

Mr D. Mann—She was involved a lot with probably thousands of children. At Parkerville, Clare Boswell and I were her favourites. She really loved us as if we were her children, but things changed as soon as we got shipped down to Padbury. As I was saying about the cottages, baby land was on the right-hand side of the road.

Senator MURRAY—How many kids would have been in baby land?

Mr D. Mann—I cannot remember; there were quite a few.

Senator MURRAY—Dozens?

Mr D. Mann—I cannot really say, because I was so young when I was there. I was only 18 months old.

Senator MURRAY—So you would go from baby land to Padbury?

Mr D. Mann—No, to St Gabriel's.

Senator MURRAY—How many kids were there?

Mr D. Mann—When I was there, there would have been between 30 and 40 kids. We lived on the outside edge of the house. The inside part was the eating area and the playing area and—

Mr B. Mann—There was the dormitory there.

Senator MURRAY—When you had grown a bit, from St Gabriel's where did you go?

Mr D. Mann—You only went as far as St Gabriel's. My sister was in Padbury, which was right next door, but I never knew she was my sister and never interacted with her.

Senator MURRAY—So if you add up all the various parts of this, how many children were in Parkerville?

Mr B. Mann—There were a couple of hundred of us when I was there.

Mr D. Mann—At least 300.

Senator MURRAY—So 200 to 300?

Mr B. Mann—Yes.

Mr D. Mann—I would say at least 300 people. There were several other cottages. I cannot remember their names.

Mr B. Mann—There was Noel Cottage, down the bottom by the pines.

Mr D. Mann—There were St Gabriel's and Padbury. There was Noel, which was a fair way away. There was another one over the road.

Mr B. Mann—Yes, St Nicholas.

Mr D. Mann—St Nicholas was towards the cottage. That is where the older kids went. When they started at high school, they went up to St Nicholas. I can think of at least six homes.

Mr B. Mann—They knocked two down.

Mr D. Mann—I believe that before 1947 there were probably nearly 20 homes there. They were spread out even further.

Senator MURRAY—Were they all of this size, with 300 kids in each home? That would be a lot of kids.

Mr D. Mann—I do not know how many would have been in the entire homes. Thinking back, I would estimate that when I was there there were between 200 and 300 kids of all ages, from toddlers up to teenagers.

Mr B. Mann—Yes, and you had the farm as well.

Mr D. Mann—As Barry said, when you were 14 you left. I have here a copy of the story that the current chap up there wrote. He is a farm manager. He was in charge of our cottage. This is an article that he wrote for the Battye Library in which he mentioned the violence. He was the oldest one in our cottage.

Mr B. Mann—He is still there today.

Mr D. Mann—Yes, he is still there today so, in my eyes, he has been institutionalised. He left but he went back; he could not handle it.

Senator MURRAY—Is this institution still going?

Mr D. Mann—Yes, Parkerville is still there, and that person, Mr Gough, is still there. He has been there most of his life.

CHAIR—Is the copy of the story you have just handed us for the committee?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you; we will receive it as information.

Mr D. Mann—That was taken from that book—I cannot remember what it is called. It is in the Battye Library. I just cannot find it. I have that many pieces of paper here—I do not know whether I am Arthur or Martha.

Mr B. Mann—I did an adult apprenticeship. I got taken under the wing of a guy who was in the orphanage before me. Our uncle, Frank, was in Parkville orphanage before us. They were all with the sisters and there was no record of abuse against any of them. All the people I know from the generation before us in Parkville did not experience abuse—and I know a lot of the people who were there then.

Senator MURRAY—We probably need to wrap this up soon, but I want to check one thing with you before we do. You articulated for the committee something that institutionalised children hate, whether they are in foster homes or institutions—that is, being labelled and being called names. I am very interested in the way you were assessed. You used the word ‘scholastically’. You appreciate that there is a difference between IQ—which is your intelligence—and learning. You can have somebody who has had no learning at all but who is very smart. You strike me as a highly intelligent man, if I may say so. In this testing, did they not distinguish between your intelligence level, which is high, and your learning level, which is low?

Mr B. Mann—No, they did not. It was just a scholastic test. Going through these institutions, you can get on retraining programs. They said to me, ‘Hey mate, you’re dense.’

Senator MURRAY—That is about literacy; that is about what you have been taught.

Mr B. Mann—Yes, but the wash-up was that, because I was so uneducated, they said, ‘By the time we educate you, you’ll be on the pension and we’ll have to toss you out the door.’ That is gospel; that is exactly what happened to me.

Senator MURRAY—You know why I am asking the question.

Mr B. Mann—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—When somebody comes for help, and they obviously have the ability to be helped, if you switch them off by treating them the wrong way, you have lost the opportunity—never mind the effect on you. Economically, it affects your ability to advance yourself.

Mr B. Mann—They killed me off in one blow, mate.

Senator MURRAY—That is the point to that story, is it not?

Mr B. Mann—They killed me off in one blow. I left that place absolutely shattered. I have educated my three children—they are very highly educated—and they have worked as lawyers, barristers, secretaries and in charge of conveyancing at the Commonwealth Bank. They are not fools. I have educated them highly yet, for myself, I could not get any of it. Basically, you do the test and they send you out to some place in West Perth, which is where I got, ‘Gee, mate’—with all the graphs and that sort of stuff—‘by the time we educate you, you’ll be on the pension, mate and pffftt out the door.’ You see why I get a little bit excited about these institutions—that is how we have been treated.

I have actually been treated the same by politicians on three occasions. I have been in dire need of help. We had a huge problem on our hands. I had finally made something out of myself

and then all of a sudden I was out in the street and I could not get educated because I would be on a pension by the time they finished with me. I could not get any help from any of the institutions, so my mum said, 'I know this politician. He's a lawyer. He's very clever fellow and a very powerful man.' She got me an appointment to go and see him and, I tell you what, if that is the type of politician we are getting now then help us, that is all I can say. It happened to me three times but, mind you, I do not think all politicians are that bad.

Senator MURRAY—There are some that are worse, you know!

Mr B. Mann—I have seen a bit of it on the TV lately. I have seen the new leaf turned over and all sorts—it is all comers. They are the people you expect an intelligent response to your huge problem from instead of being—pffft!—straight out the door.

Senator MURRAY—All I can say in response is that human understanding and education do not necessarily go together. You have met lots of people who are very clever and very well educated but are not real smart.

Mr B. Mann—Morally and socially inept would be more like it, because they have never experienced the hard times.

Senator MURRAY—I told you you were bright.

Mr B. Mann—No worries.

Senator McLUCAS—I will be brief. It seems from the commentary this morning and from your submission, Doug, that you are obviously happy with going to counselling and receiving counselling.

Mr D. Mann—I am a TPI pensioner with the repatriation department and I see a psychiatrist about every six weeks. That will probably be an ongoing thing. I am permanently on antidepressants and I take medication to help me sleep at night because I have flashbacks from my childhood and also from my military service.

Senator McLUCAS—I made a note when I was reading your submission that you have got two experiences that are difficult.

Mr D. Mann—Yes. My experiences in Parkerville were compounded by my experiences in Vietnam. I believed I was living up to Australian traditions—the ANZAC traditions—but they cannot teach you how to behave when you are close to death. I could have been killed seven times but by the grace of God I am still here today. I think I was meant to be here to meet my wife and have two daughters. As I said, I should have been killed at least seven times. I had bullets come into the dirt so close in front of me that they showered dirt into my eyes. I had nowhere to go. I could not roll away because there was no cover. I just had to lie there and think, 'In the next second I will be dead.' We were blown up, and that was when all my mates, the blokes I bonded with, were killed and wounded. We had nine killed and 22 wounded in this one incident. My platoon commander saved my life by telling me, 'Manny, you sit down there.' I was the batman—wherever the platoon commander goes the batman leads the way. He saved my

life by telling me to sit down there. Within five minutes he was dead. He died of injuries later, but we had nine killed and 22 injured in just that one incident.

On another occasion, we had booby traps when we walked along a fence. We had several high-ranking officers killed because somebody leant against the fence and it was booby trapped. I was in sight of all this. I was within from here to the wall away from one of my platoon commanders when he was talking to us. He just took half a step backwards and stood on a mine. He was blown to pieces right before my eyes. It has all had a compounding effect on me. It has made me feel that I will be like a liability for the rest of my life until I die.

Senator McLUCAS—People might argue a bit with that, Doug.

Mr D. Mann—I am amazed that I lived. These days I basically live day to day. I do not make plans for six months time or anything. I am alive today; tomorrow I might be dead. I just do my own thing and stick by myself. I still read books, but it does not sink in anymore. I read books and I put them aside and, when I get them out again in a few weeks time and I re-read them, it is just as if I am reading them for the first time.

Senator McLUCAS—Do you find the counselling is of benefit to you?

Mr D. Mann—Yes, it has helped me to try to live with the way I am. I do not know how my wife ever put up with me.

Senator McLUCAS—Have you had the same counsellor over a long period of time?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

Senator McLUCAS—Is that important?

Mr D. Mann—Yes.

Senator McLUCAS—Was the counsellor an appropriate person to talk to? We have heard from a lot of witnesses that it is sometimes hard—and you made this point, Barry—to get someone who understands the experience that you have had. Obviously, Doug, that was a person who did understand.

Mr D. Mann—I do not think it really helped with my Parkerville situation.

Senator McLUCAS—So it was more to do with Vietnam?

Mr D. Mann—He had never had anything to do with that type of thing but he was probably one of the best counsellors in this state for Vietnam veterans. I was lucky in some respects because I had a very good counsellor to start with from the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service. I went from the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service to this doctor. He voluntarily gives his time to the veterans counselling service. He is an extremely busy man and it is extremely hard to get to see this particular doctor. He is involved with the veterans and he knows how to specifically treat veterans because he has specifically devoted himself to helping veterans. But, as far as my childhood is concerned, he was not able to help. But that has all been

interwoven with my Vietnam experience. It is just like a continuation of my childhood. The way I am today is just a continuation of what it was like when I was a kid.

Senator McLUCAS—Barry, have you ever tried to seek counselling? Have you had any experience with—

Mr B. Mann—Yes. I went through a pretty bad time. I had a lot on at the time. I had lost my job and my future; I had poor health; my father died; I had to go to hospital and have an operation on my face for skin cancer—I am pretty rotten with it these days—people were threatening to bash my boy; and there were other things. I nearly came undone. I would never waste my time going to see another one. All it did for me was reinforce the fact that I was actually seeing things correctly. All they want to do is drug you out of your mind—and that is it. That is not for me.

Senator McLUCAS—Was it a psychologist or a psychiatrist?

Mr B. Mann—A psychiatrist. They just gave me a heap of pills.

Senator McLUCAS—So they wanted to medicate you rather than talk?

Mr B. Mann—He talked. He was a very learned man. He reinforced that what was happening to me was happening to me and it was not a figment of my imagination. Do you know what I mean—like making a mountain out of a molehill? I was dealing with some very serious issues. They were trying to tear my family apart and, with everything coming together, I nearly came undone. It was very close. It did me a lot of damage. I do not think I will ever get over the damage that did to me because not only did it affect me personally but also on another level most of my life's work went with it.

Senator McLUCAS—I read it in your submission.

Mr B. Mann—Hopefully I will resurrect a lot of that, because I have a memory like an elephant. I can remember a lot—although there are a lot of things that will not come back.

Senator McLUCAS—I would like to thank you both for sharing your stories with us.

CHAIR—Yes, thank you very much, gentlemen.

Mr B. Mann—I appreciate your time.

Mr D. Mann—It is our pleasure.

Mr B. Mann—I just hope that you do something for us.

Mr D. Mann—Earlier I mentioned a book. That book was *The Noisy Mansions: The Story of Swanleigh, 1868-1971* by Mr Peterkin. He passed away this year. He was involved with organising lots of homes and things. Mr Peterkin was involved in Parkerville District School and the majority of the homes around the place.

CHAIR—Thank you gentlemen.

[12:17 p.m.]

PETERSON, Ms Margaret Rosemary, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome Ms Margaret Peterson. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Peterson—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, which will be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms Peterson—I am basically here to get the government to face up to what happened to me. This is going to be a very painful session, and I want answers. I will start from 1988. In 1988 I got my files from the Department for Community Services. I took those files home and read them. I did not like what I saw. A week later I woke up and I was in la la land. I could not understand what had happened. My friend took to me to the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital D20 psychiatric ward.

When the doctor called me into the room I explained that the Department for Community Services gave me my documents without any counselling whatsoever. The doctor asked me what the problem was. I cannot and never will understand why the community deprived me of a mother and a father because of the colour of my skin. My mother was pack-raped at 16 years of age. I was the child of that pack-rape. I was put in St Joseph's Orphanage. The Department for Community Services took me to court to make me a state ward and, because of the colour of my skin, I was totally unsuitable for adoption. I spent 18 years in St Joseph's Orphanage, all because of the colour of my skin. I was not Aboriginal. I have never come to terms with this; I never will.

I wrote to Robert Hawke when he was the Prime Minister. I wanted so much to have a mother when I was a child. I wanted so much for a mother to come and take me away from what was happening to me. I am on Prothiaden for the rest of my life. I am a loner. I cannot understand it. I took my files up to Sister Anselm—I am sorry, you will understand she has passed on—and showed them to her. I told her what had happened, and she cried. She looked after me as a child in a foundling home. She could never understand it. She said. 'Margaret, Aboriginal children were fostered out; they were adopted out.' Somebody in the community welfare department did not like the colour of my skin—it is even on the documents: 'She is such a beautiful little girl but, unfortunately, she has got coloured blood in her. She is totally unsuitable for adoption.'

How do you find the fact that I had 18 years of abuse? I have been flogged. I have scars all over my body inflicted on me by those mongrels. What their god did to me made me doubt there

was such a thing as a god. He allowed this to go on, and this was St Joseph's Orphanage. I stood by and I saw many girls getting flogged at that orphanage. I saw an awful lot of child abuse. If those mongrels come here and state that it never happened, my God, they have a lot to answer for.

When I was sent to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, they got me a lawyer to front community welfare. The lawyer said, 'We'll sue the balls off the government for what they did, incarcerating you for 18 years of your life'—and the only reason was that I had coloured blood in me. I am angry; I am very angry. When I left that place, I was so screwed up. Behind the photograph in front of you is a very screwed up person. I was in my twenties then and I had not even got my documents, so behind that photograph was a very screwed up person. So you know where I am coming from and how angry I am.

Jean Jenkins took my files to parliament in Canberra. One of the Evans family stood up and said, 'What happened here is a damned disgrace.' You know I am not Aboriginal. I am not white, I am not black, I am me and I am proud of who I am. But it took me years to get there. I was like an animal on the floor of Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, screaming and reliving what they did to me. I always wanted a mother. I always wanted a mother and a father. People have families here. People have their mums and their dads. A lot of these people do not understand what this means. My daughter does not have any family other than me and her father. My daughter knows nothing about all of this but today she is going to find out.

When I was put into a foster home as a very small person I was sexually abused in that foster home. The worst part of being sexually abused is that it is worse than being flogged, because it never leaves you. I have been through so much. I have come out damned good. I do not have any criminal record. But when I was pregnant with my daughter I spent five months in a private room in a psychiatric hospital because I did not have a family. I had nobody because of what the government did to me. I blame the government. There was no 'sorry'. Community welfare, when I fronted them up, said to me, 'Your alleged abuse'. How dare they say 'alleged abuse'? That is what you will get from them: 'It is alleged—it never happened.'

I saw a lot. If you ever had any sores, they said, 'Put your hands behind your back.' If you did not, you got your face slapped time and time again. You were dragged around the floor by your hair. They represented their god. They did not represent the Catholic Church at all. They were bloody mongrels that went into these places—disguised child abusers. I saw a lot of it. I am sorry if I am angry: I have been such a loner through all of this. Then again, when I look back, there were the child migrants—I see a lot of child migrants. They are my friends. With abuse, it does not make any difference what colour or nationality you are. I was with them. I was just a half-breed.

I said to Community Services, when I got these documents, 'One minute I am okay, but then I am becoming a very destructive person.' I said, 'At that time I was being sexually abused.' I had been trying to find out for years who my biological mother was. My biological mother is white. I eventually found out from a girl that I was working with at the time, who came from Mount Magnet. This girl turned around and said: 'I know a girl of that name. It was the talk of the town. Something terrible happened to her.' She asked me, 'Why?' I said, 'Because I think that's my mother.' She found out the address. I went and saw this woman. This woman said to me, 'I didn't want you then and I don't want you now.'

For years I used to send her bouquets of flowers. I have three brothers and a sister who were also on my community welfare files and who I knew nothing about. I longed so much to have a family. I was not a person whose parents were drunk or whatever. My brothers were very shocked when they found out I existed. But, as one of them said, 'If you were white, things would be different.' It was the same with my sister. One of my brothers and I get on well.

But it was my sister-in-law that found out exactly what happened. She used to ring me and tell me what was going on. Every time the old girl was in the hospital—I was just wanting to be accepted, you know, and just to say, 'You're my mum', but it never happened—I would buy bouquets of flowers. I would send them and say who they were from and say, 'I hope you get better.' Never once did she reply. All she could say to me was: 'Look what you have done to me. I went through hell because of you.' The only thing I did to her was that I breathed and I was alive. That was the problem. She abandoned me. The commissioner of police was looking for her, and everybody—it is on my files.

Community welfare have now apologised to me. They will now look at people's files and look into those files before they hand them to people. I am a half breed. I used to go and have to have showers and they'd stand there and smell me. I had to put my hands out. To those blasted nuns I was just a little nigger, you know. That is the foulest word that anybody could ever use to me. You were forced to put shoes on your feet if they did not fit. I have bad feet because of that and as I am getting older it is affecting me. I was taken out of school at 13—around about then. I did night duty and looked after all these children. After you had finished that, you would work in a big laundry on big mangle presses.

All I want to know from the government is: why? Why did my skin make any difference to anybody? I am not an ugly person. I was not ugly. I was not disfigured. I was damn good looking. It took me years to find out I was good looking, because I had been brought up to think that I was the absolute scum of the earth. There was nobody to tell what was happening to me. Many a time I wanted somebody to come and take me from that hell hole. All this was done in the name of their damn religions. That is the way I look at it. The ones that are alive now were not there. They cannot say it never happened. They were not there to see it. So I do not understand what happened.

Even when my daughter's father and I were going to get married, Pete said, 'How am I going to tell my family you are coloured and illegitimate?' It was then I said to Pete, 'No,' but he had no idea what was behind it all. It wasn't until my daughter grew up and went to the United States and told her father what had happened to me that he found out. He is a mortician. The whole point is: I never forgot. I was locked up in a church with a damn nun that was dead and the candles beside the coffin. The whole room was dark. That was my punishment—to hug them and kiss them goodbye with their damn cotton wool hanging out of their heads, out of their noses. We had to hug them, after what they did to us as children, and we did it because we were dead scared. They have an awful lot to answer for.

I am sorry that I am angry about this, but this is how I feel. I have waited a long time to front the government about what happened to me—since 1988. I am not a bitter woman, but I am a woman that has been very hurt. Aboriginal people don't even have this document, because Robert was in the institution with me, in the St Vincent's family home. He was stunned. He said, 'We don't have a document like this to say that this is what they put us in the home for.' The

only reason I was kept there was because I was coloured. Well, hello—I was coloured: what did they expect me to do as I grew up? I have a scar on my head where a nun hit me across the head with a dust brush. I cut my own hair because I am embarrassed when somebody says to me, ‘Do you know you have got a scar on your head? Oh dear.’ I got to the stage where I did not want to answer people. I did not want to say what it was. I sit in front of the mirror and cut my own hair. I wear trousers all the time because I am scarred. I just do not understand why I went through that living hell.

For years I was on night duty looking after children—in the middle of the night. People go on strike because they are not paid enough for it, but you have no idea what we went through as children. Where was I supposed to go? Was I supposed to be killed off eventually by the nuns or what? I wasn’t educated.

One girl said to me, after I had first come out with this institutional abuse, ‘How come you’ve got a voice?’ I said, ‘You can be pushed so far and then you explode, because you’re no longer frightened. I am no longer frightened of them.’ I fronted up to the Mercy order and I told them what had happened. They wanted to know the names of the nuns that were involved in a lot of it. They were not all cruel, but there was a handful of them who were absolute mongrels. They were bitches who were going through their menopause—that is the way I look at it, because they could not stand children. They had no right to be looking after children. They would have never got a job with children if they had been screened. These days they would never get one.

I feel now is my chance to tell you all exactly how I feel and how my daughter has been deprived of aunties, uncles, cousins, any of that—the works. That is how I feel. Eighteen years! As I said to Robert Hawke: ‘You cried at the South African apartheid system; I wonder if you would drop a tear for me.’ I wrote to them—and there is probably a letter there somewhere—about exactly how I felt: where is my justice? I wrote to Desmond Tutu. I wrote to Jesse Jackson. I put my documents to the world court on human rights regarding what they did to me—18 years of abuse. I have the memory and the scars. I have my own little place where I shut myself out so that nobody can harm me.

The whole thing with my daughter’s father, the coffins, the deaths! I get on very well with him, by the way. I have a sense of humour. I am not a bitter woman. When I walk out of this place, this all stays here. I do not carry that on my sleeve. But whenever I am fronted up with a government—whether it is the social security department or it is the Homeswest department—I freeze; I panic with absolute panic if I have anything to do with them, because I saw so much.

Each one of you has a different story, because it is what you went through, not what everybody else went through. That is the way you see it. That is the way you saw it as a child and growing up. I did not know what a birthday is. My daughter will tell you that I cannot even accept a birthday present. I cannot accept Christmas. I would like to take a dose of valium on Christmas Eve and wake up on Boxing Day. That is what it means to me; that is how my life has been. And who did all this to me?

I do not understand it all. You do not tell anybody you were brought up in an orphanage, because everybody feels bitter; everybody feels sorry for you: ‘Oh, you were brought up in an orphanage. Oh dear!’ My problem was made worse by the fact that I did not even know who the hell I was when people asked, ‘What nationality are you?’ There was a time when I turned

around and said to doctors, 'I was a souvenir from the war celebrations.' That is the way I put it, because I did not know who I was.

When I had my daughter, I was in a loony bin with all these people. I had a private room. The night I gave birth to my daughter, I ended up in the hospital there. They were wonderful to me. They treated me with dignity. I mixed with these people. These people were my family. These people were wonderful to me. Where were the parents? Where was the mother, aunt, uncle or whoever? There was none of that. I brought my daughter up on my own. The thing is that you live this life and you are terrified that the welfare are going to walk in and take your kid. They would want to help—I did not want their help. When my daughter had bacterial meningitis, I was there. There was nobody standing around my kid's bed. I would never accept any help from the government—never. I asked Community Services for an apology. It was the same as for the Aboriginals—you do not get it.

I am sorry, but I have run out of things. But the main thing I wanted to ask you is: why? I am a big girl now. I am nearly 60. But this does not follow me right through my life once I walk out that door. The only time that I ever have to think about it or talk about it is when I get angry. I do not drink—well, water I do—but it is a wonder I am not an alcoholic. But I am damn proud of myself; I am damn proud of it. And it was not the nuns that put me there, it was sheer determination. No doubt Tomie's father is going to know about this on the phone tonight.

CHAIR—Is there anything else you would like to say, Ms Peterson?

Ms Peterson—Sorry, but I think I have said enough through absolute anger.

CHAIR—No. You are fine. Do not worry. We might ask you some questions, if you do not mind.

Ms Peterson—Please do.

CHAIR—When did you first meet your mother?

Ms Peterson—I first met her when I was 21 or 22.

CHAIR—So she told you the truth about your birth?

Ms Peterson—She told my brother's wife the truth, because she could not front up to me.

CHAIR—Because doesn't that say that it may be a Maori—

Ms Peterson—That situation is because the grandmother knew that she would be in an awful lot of trouble with community service, so they had to come up with something like that. That is what that is. That is a pack of lies.

CHAIR—I do not understand what you mean.

Ms Peterson—She came down to the orphanage where I was. St. Josephs Orphanage also had a place for unmarried mothers. That is where it was. Because they were such good Catholics,

they came down to Perth and the grandmother put the old lady in there as an unmarried mother. There were no questions asked, but when the welfare did they said the father may have been a Maori, and what a load of rubbish. And as the old lady admitted, that is absolute rubbish. The truth was—

CHAIR—So when did you find that out?

Ms Peterson—I found that out in about 1988 when we got my files because I fronted up to them about it.

CHAIR—I see. Do you think the nuns would have been aware that you were being made ineligible for adoption because of—

Ms Peterson—No.

CHAIR—You said you had a nice—

Ms Peterson—I do not think so. There was this particular nun, who was a wonderful nun, and she has passed on. I showed Sister the documents. We sat there, and she cried. She said to me, ‘Aboriginal children were adopted out or fostered out. I just don’t understand why they did this.’ And this was a woman in her nineties. She passed away last year. But the whole point is, if you were coloured blood in a home—unfortunately, there are people that are racist, but we hear this word when we come out of a home—when we were all in together, we were all the same. We were neither black nor white; we were just kids. But as adults, it is a different story altogether. But I do not think the nuns knew.

CHAIR—In your time there, was it considered unusual that you were there for so long? Do you remember any comments being made? Were you ever fostered out?

Ms Peterson—For a very short time. I tried to get my records from the hospital about this, but they obviously do not keep them back that far. I came home from school—from kindy, I think you call it—and I remember the bedroom. I remember the woman—this woman, she used to beat the living daylight out of me—because I remember getting under the bed. This is leading up to something. I remember her getting under the bed and dragging me out. I remember being rushed off to Princess Margaret Hospital. I had peritonitis. My appendix busted. From there I went straight back to St. Josephs Orphanage. Whether or not they found out whether they were bruises or God knows what all over me, I do not know, but I spent a small time in—

CHAIR—When you found out in 1988, when you got these documents, was there something you suspected before that?

Ms Peterson—No.

CHAIR—What did you think you would find in the documents? Obviously you suspected you were not fully white or something.

Ms Peterson—Medical records. I suppose you would look at it as curiosity towards what the government had written about me.

CHAIR—Did you know who your mother was before that?

Ms Peterson—Before 1988? Yes.

CHAIR—Had you seen her before that? Had she seen you?

Ms Peterson—Yes. I do not know how old I was or what the year was. It was when I was 21 or 20. So it would be then. Yes. Many a time I went backwards and forward trying to find out who I was and what I was. ‘It’s got nothing to do with you, Margaret. Look what you put me through.’ Hello! I was the child from that pack rape. She had the problem, not me. It was a bit of a shock. Unfortunately, they found a little nigger in the woodpile and that was quite an embarrassment to them all. My sister and all my brothers are all lilywhite with blonde hair.

But there was another incident. In the home, you all sat at the same chairs when you had dinner. There was a girl who sat for years beside me. I saw a photograph of my younger brother that I talk to of him when he was younger. I said to my sister-in-law, ‘A girl like that was at the home. She was the spitting image of him.’ I took the photo over and, blow me down, sure enough this girl happened to have been my first cousin. We used to sit beside one another. I still have not met her from that day to this.

The rest of this so-called family that I have do not know I exist. It is an embarrassment. A woman there was very sick a few months ago. I was asked, ‘Could you go down to her and make it up to her and say you’re sorry?’ For what? I will put the pillow on her head and help her on her merry way. That is the way I look at it. I have a warped sense of humour.

Senator McLUCAS—Do you get support from other people to help you through what you are going through?

Ms Peterson—No. I do not like sitting around at group therapy or counselling or whatever you like to call it repeating the same thing over and over again.

Senator McLUCAS—You need to move on?

Ms Peterson—You need to move on. That is where I am.

Senator McLUCAS—Have you had counselling or support up until now at all?

Ms Peterson—I would not say it was counselling or support. I have had time in at Charlie’s because sometimes I could not handle things. I would therefore go into Charles Gairdner. But I was never put on any medications. Only once was I asked to go to a meeting, because people said, ‘She’s not going to these group therapy meetings.’ I sat there listening and everybody said what they had to say and when it came to my turn I said, ‘Everybody here, wake up to yourselves! None of you get on with members of your family and that is what you are here for. How do you think I cope when there is no family? Why don’t you wake up to yourselves and throw out your pills and get on with life?’ They never asked me back to a meeting after that.

The time that I went to Charles Gairdner in 1988 there was a doctor sitting there in the psychiatric unit and he said to me, ‘Margaret, can you see things that are not there?’ I bent over

and said to him, 'You're never alone, Doc, if you're schizophrenic.' That was it: they realised I had my marbles. The fact was that I was totally traumatised. He just said to me, 'Where did you get that from?' I said, 'A poster in a newsagent.' Nobody had ever said that.

I do have a sense of humour but I do have a past that is terribly painful. I do not think that for as long as I live that any of you could ever find out for me why my skin is a different colour. I am put down as a half-breed there. A one, a strike and a two. 'She's a half-caste. She's not an Abo.' How insulting. I do not know whether the whole mob in Community Services and welfare did this but one person with a stroke of a pen sentenced me to 18 years of child abuse because I breathed.

When you go home tonight, hug your kids and tell them how much you really appreciate them. When people have never experienced what it is like to communicate with a father, mother, aunt or uncle, when they have not got that, Christmas is stuffed because that is what it is all about. Three masses at night-time; three masses at Christmas. You got your presents and you got to open them, but as you walked passed the door each present went into a box and got flogged on fete days. The *Daily News* newspaper used to have a picnic at the zoo every year that we got to go to. The people of Perth contributed presents to all us children supposedly, but we never saw them.

We never ever touched those dolls that you see in the photographs. The fancy tablecloths were there for the welfare staff. This is less traumatised than what I was when I was a child. The welfare workers would come and sit there and you would talk to them. If you had bruises or were scarred or if the nuns had flogged the living daylight out of you or whatever, they would tell the welfare workers that you were not well. You could not tell the welfare workers that they were flogging you. You have to be kidding. But they did, all in the name of their damn religion. That is the way that I look at it. Sure, you learnt dancing and elocution; we all talked like a pack of Poms!

The whole thing is that there were some good times, but it is strange I can only remember the bad. I remember my whole childhood being in tears. I wanted somebody to care about me; that is what I wanted. I wanted somebody to take me out of the orphanage at Christmases et cetera. I never went out of the orphanage. I do not even know why I was never allowed out every second Sunday, when people would come and take the kids out. I have no idea why I was not allowed out. They have a lot to answer for; may they rot in hell. Excuse my French, but I want nothing to do with them. And that is the reason why I am not coming tomorrow. I have already fronted up to them. As I said, there were some absolutely wonderful nuns; there is no doubt about it. You scavenged for your food. You know, you just—

Senator MURRAY—You have raised something in your submission which I have heard about, but I have not seen it put like this before. I will read it to you:

Another thing that used to go on was that if the nuns thought you weren't the full quid, you would be sterilised, but not here, at Graylands Lunatic Asylum. I remember three child migrant girls who were thought to be 'out of control' ...

Ms Peterson—Yes, that did go on.

Senator MURRAY—This is in the fifties and sixties. Are you telling the committee that girls who were in these institutions were forcibly sterilised?

Ms Peterson—There were girls that were.

Senator MURRAY—Were there large numbers of them?

Ms Peterson—I know a handful of them. I do not know how far back it goes.

Senator MURRAY—You were there for 18 years.

Ms Peterson—Yes. Whether it goes back prior to 1940—

Senator MURRAY—Would it be a dozen or more or less?

Ms Peterson—I know of, I would say, half-a-dozen girls, and I know that. Of the girls I know who went to the Graylands mental institution, one was a very good friend of mine who has now passed on. She was taken from St Joseph's Orphanage. I never knew until her funeral—because Minnie could not tell me—that they had sent her because she was an overactive teenager. But she was not the only one.

Another girl I met on the train told me the whole trauma of what happened to her as a child migrant sent to Good Shepherd and two other girls. She thought she was going back to St Joseph's Orphanage. Mary, who was a child migrant, told me—and I was devastated—that she and two other girls who were child migrants were driven to this big place with a big fence. She remembers trying to get out of that place, and she remembers the taxi taking her into that place and the gates being shut. The drug that she told me she was fed on was Largactil. Mary told Mrs whatever what her circumstances were—that all she was was a rebellious teenager—and she was out of there. I said to Margaret, 'What happened to the other two girls?' She said, 'They died. They couldn't cope with it.'

Senator MURRAY—Died in the sense of suicided?

Ms Peterson—No. Died in Graylands.

Senator MURRAY—From what?

Ms Peterson—I have no idea. I did not go into it with Mary. When Mary told me this I was absolutely floored. I found out at Minnie's funeral.

Senator MURRAY—This person you are referring to was forcibly sterilised?

Ms Peterson—Not Mary; there were other people. Let us put it this way: some of the girls were not exactly the full quid. Therefore the nuns felt that it was the right thing to do to sterilise them. I do not think it is their goddamned given right.

Senator MURRAY—What does that mean—

Ms Peterson—They were sent off to the hospital.

Senator MURRAY—No. What does that mean: ‘not the full quid’?

Ms Peterson—What I would consider not the full quid. I would not say slightly retarded. I do not know what you would call ‘not the full quid’. They were not with it, I suppose.

Senator MURRAY—They were not what? I am sorry.

Ms Peterson—I do not know what you would call it. My interpretation of not being the full quid is somebody who is not the full quid.

Senator McLUCAS—Mentally impaired?

Ms Peterson—Slightly, yes.

Senator MURRAY—But in the nuns’ judgment or in your judgment?

Ms Peterson—If you look at it, I would say their judgment. The fact is: what goddamned given right did they have to do that to people? I know it happened.

Senator MURRAY—I asked you whether that was in the nuns’ judgment or your judgment because we know that the nuns in these institutions would often classify children in a very cruel and wrongful manner.

Ms Peterson—Only the girls that we knew were slightly that way were the ones that were done.

Senator MURRAY—Were the other kids threatened with this sort of treatment?

Ms Peterson—You never knew. I never knew anything about it until I left.

Senator MURRAY—How did you find out about it?

Ms Peterson—Because we were told by the person concerned.

Senator MURRAY—By the girls who had been sterilised?

Ms Peterson—Yes! We turned around and said, ‘You what?’ ‘Oh yeah, the nuns did it.’ But because the fear was put into those people, you could not stand up to those people. Not on your life would you stand up to those people.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You made reference to the fact that you were not allowed to be given up for adoption because you were considered to have coloured skin.

Ms Peterson—Mm.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did you receive worse treatment in the orphanage, relative to the other girls, because of the colour of your skin?

Ms Peterson—Schooling; not allowed out; did not go out anywhere. I just do not know.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did the white girls go out?

Ms Peterson—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did they have families who took them out?

Ms Peterson—Some of them had their parents: mother, father or whatever. Some of them had people who used to come up and take them away for holidays—the Christmas holidays or Easter holidays. I do not know why.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you think your life would have been a lot better if you had been adopted?

Ms Peterson—You're joking, aren't you? Yes, I think so. My daughter would have grandparents. My daughter would have aunties, uncles and cousins. She has got none of those. It goes on to the next generation. I was not educated. I talk as though I am educated but I am not. We are all Poms.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You said that your daughter would find out today what had happened to you.

Ms Peterson—Yes, that is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Have you not discussed this—

Ms Peterson—I tried to, but I did not want to tell her how bad it was. She has never seen me go off my face—never. I hid it for years.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you still bottle up a lot of that experience inside you?

Ms Peterson—Whenever I am asked to go up to a reunion, they can go to hell. I will not go. Why would I go up for a reunion? You go up to Cath McAuley's place and often wonder whether you are nuts, because you can still hear the kids screaming in your mind from what went on there. I am not talking about a smack here or a smack there; I am talking about a lot of abuse. I would like to know why the government did this. I want to know why the government did what they did to me. I was not out on some reserve and dragged in. I was not a child migrant that came from a ship who put their hand up and said, 'Yes, we'll go to Australia for a holiday.' This is what I do not understand. I am damn sure that I am not nuts. I cannot get it through my head.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are these unanswered questions getting harder to live with as you get older?

Ms Peterson—My grandkids and my daughter will find out just how hard it is for me to try to keep a straight face. When her dad rang and wanted to talk about all of this, I did not want to. But I do not care now. She can ring Iowa tonight and tell him. He was the only person who showed me any understanding, or anything, and I refused to marry him. Little did I know what it was going to be like. I never told him, because I was ashamed and I did not know who the hell I was. I worked with the US Navy in Exmouth and I worked up at the north cape lodge at Exmouth. Things were different and my life was different. I was too ashamed of everything. I could not tell. I had a make-believe family. I had a family that did not even exist. I was so embarrassed that I did not know my mother and father. The government should have looked into this. What sort of a life did it leave me with? The guy that I absolutely idolised I had to turn around and say no to two weeks beforehand. I should be married, and I said no. It was not that long ago. It is very hard, because he was the only person in my life that cared about me and I could not tell him what the whole thing was about. So I have regrets. We speak. If only. My daughter gets on very well with her father and all of her father's family—her aunts in San Francisco, her family in Des Moines, Iowa, and her family in Carlisle in Iowa. Her sister, who is in the US Navy in Hawaii, came out here on a boat not long ago. They all accept my daughter. But, with this situation here, nobody accepts me—nobody accepts her. But that is the way it is. That is life.

She will always be accepted by her family. But her family will probably, after this, find out. She will ring her father and say, 'Well, mum has actually done this.' And that is the end of it. We have talked about it. We talked about it for a long time one time on the phone: 'Why didn't you tell me?' 'I couldn't.' Who knows? One day I could go over to Iowa and freeze my butt off. No way! That is all I have got to say. That is how I feel about it. Obviously I will never find out from the government why they did what they did. Do you have an answer?

CHAIR—We cannot help you there, Ms Peterson.

Ms Peterson—That is right. The writing is there; the document is there to state this. I am a pretty happy person. I have got a life besides this. I have got my grandkids. I have got my daughter. I have got my dog. I have got my child migrant friends. I have a life. And I do not need to go to a psychiatrist. Only when I talk like this, it all comes back. I am sorry if I have upset anybody, but that is just tough luck. That is the way I feel about it. I have a sense of humour, and that is it.

CHAIR—You certainly have. Thank you very much for sharing that with us today.

Ms Peterson—Good. Thanks a lot.

Proceedings suspended from 1.07 p.m. to 1.45 p.m.

CLARKE, Ms Julia Wendy, Watchmen in God's Service

GILL, Ms Elizabeth Anne, Member, Watchmen in God's Service

PRITCHETT, Ms Mary Patricia, Coordinator, Watchmen in God's Service

BOX, Mr Steve, (Private capacity)

HOOPER, Mr Trevor Allan, (Private capacity)

LOWE, Mrs Janet Elizabeth, (Private capacity)

McGEE, Ms Sue, (Private capacity)

McVEIGH, Mr Leo, (Private capacity)

NOTEBOOM, Ms Paula, (Private capacity)

Phillip, (Private capacity)

STEPHEN, Ms Marie, (Private capacity)

VAN AALST, Mrs Jenny, (Private capacity)

VAN AALST, Mr Theo, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome Ms Mary Pritchett and representatives from WINGS. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Pritchett—I am a coordinator for WINGS community group. WINGS stands for Watchmen in God's Service.

CHAIR—The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you and other witnesses have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Pritchett—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it a submission from WINGS. I understand that each member was making a presentation. I invite you to commence those presentations, Ms Pritchett, to be followed by questions from the committee if time permits.

Ms Pritchett—First of all I want to say thank you for taking the time out to do this inquiry. It is a very important inquiry on an issue which it is much easier to slip underneath the carpet and pretend is not happening. We really appreciate the opportunity to be able to present some case histories that represent that a great deal of abuse is going on within the protection agencies. I have not been abused. I was not put in care; I am not coming from an abuse situation. I first began this because of my daughter. I had a 14-year-old daughter who was raped and went quite screwy. For a year, we were dragging her out of the streets. After that year, she announced that she had moved in with a man.

Naively, I thought that the police or some authority would help me to bring her home. I had her in counselling and I had her in school. But I found that that did not happen. I went to the police and they told me that they could not interfere, that I had to go to Family and Children's Services. I went to Family and Children's Services, who said that she was 15 and they would do nothing about it. So I got pressure put on by local politicians and I got an article in the paper. As a result of that, they said they would go and speak to her. But the result was that, basically, she was not at risk, in their estimation. Then there were reports written to say that I was upset about my loss of power and control.

Time went on, and I sought help from the shadow minister, who raised questions in parliament. The minister, Rhonda Parker, said that she was happy with the way her department had handled this. I had been telling the department for several months that the man had a criminal record and I was asking them to look into the criminal record, which they did not do, except in the days before the parliamentary hearing.

Then everything went into an abyss again until she had been gone eight months. At that stage I got a telephone call from her. She wanted money. I was told that I could see her if I raised the money. I did that. I went out to a hotel at 11 o'clock at night and gave her the money. She had the opportunity to say in a couple of minutes that she had been threatened that her throat would be cut, that I would be killed and that her animals would be taken from her if she tried to leave this man. Basically, I ended up having to get the police, because he would not allow her to leave with me.

When she came home, I found that very shortly after she had moved in with this man, she had been injected with heroin. I found out with hindsight that the man was on charges for being a heroin dealer. He had a whole string of young girls whom the police knew had been abused by him. There were two outstanding violence orders from them. She had been made pregnant and punched in the stomach until such time as she miscarried. She is one of three that I know. And all this was happening while she was supposedly not at risk.

As a result of that, I went from a very naive situation into a situation where I came to realise that things are not as they should be and nor are they as the general public expect them to be within this department. She went missing again, because now she was very much in need of drugs. She was up to a \$700 a day habit. Her young friend went missing too, so there was publicity. This was around the time of the Claremont murders. The media wanted to talk to me, and I said that I blamed Family and Children's Services for leaving her in that situation without the investigation into his record that was necessary at the time. I got 80 to 90 phone calls from other parents in the same situation, so I formed a parent group, called Caring Parents, and from that people started to cross my path who declared that they had been abused in care. The group

took a shift and currently my focus is mainly on trying to support those people who have been placed in care and have been sexually and physically abused in that situation.

That is an outline of how I came to be doing what I am doing. There is a book called *Rockspider* written by Chris O'Connor, who headed a task force in Melbourne to look into the exploitation of children. He says in his book that he had no idea of the degree or enormity of the problem of children being exploited and that most of the children being used on child pornography web sites are coming from those children in welfare and on the streets. As I have just told you, many young children are left on the streets with no intervention. There are houses that these children are taken to, and the dealers give them drugs until such time as they are addicted and they become a useful commodity in prostitution et cetera. Chris O'Connor says in his book that this is where the children are coming from and, if you stop to think about it, that is rational. You cannot get hundreds of thousands of children to use in sexual images from the regular family unit; you have to find children who are vulnerable, children who do not have supervision or anybody to turn to say, 'This is happening.' In many instances, that means using children who are on welfare. And, as one lady will expand on when she comes up to talk to you, many of these young people, when they leave care, are approached to go into prostitution. They come out of care with no job, no money and no family, and they are then prime pickings for the prostitution industry.

I would like to touch on the way that the department assess abuse when it comes to their carers. It seems to be considerably different to the way they assess abuse when it comes to the individual or the parent. I would like to introduce Trevor Hooper, who has given me a report. I will read a bit to you. This is from a report regarding a very young child, Trevor's stepdaughter. There was a complaint to the department, and it says that she was:

- a) Sleeping in the foster carer's bed.
- b) Locked outside the house until late.
- c) Held on the ground and forced to eat meat.
- d) Dragged out of bed at 2.00am and being placed in a cold shower for soiling bed clothes.

The report goes on to state:

Whilst elements of truth exist about some of the parenting methods used eg. time outside and showers in the night, the inference of abusive practice was not seen to be true.

I will pass over to Mr Hooper to tell you a little more about the history of that particular case.

Mr Hooper—I would like to thank you for coming and hearing our stories of cases of abuse. I am a stepfather of five children—four of whom have been sexually abused. The child referred to in the case was three-and-a-half years old when she was snatched from the family. It was later proven that she was sexually abused, most probably by someone known to the family. I cannot say who—or can I?

CHAIR—No.

Mr Hooper—I just want to be careful because court cases could be pending. She was taken away. Whilst in foster care she refused to eat her meat, so she was forcibly fed it. The foster carer would grab hold of her head and move her jaw up and down so that she would chew the meat. She has returned home—all the children who were in foster care have now returned home—but she will not eat meat at all. It is like trying to draw blood from a stone to get this child to do anything. She is very rebellious. Also while in foster care, if she soiled herself or soiled the bed at night, she was dragged out and put under a cold shower. That is how she was cleaned. It was not a warm shower. This has been verified by her two sisters who were with her in care.

There are some other issues I would like to raise. The history of abuse goes back to 1987. My wife reported the first bout of abuse by her husband to the department, and he was charged at the time with regard to one of the daughters. During that time, disclosures were made by the daughter who was abused that the second daughter down from her was abused as well. The perpetrator—my wife's former husband—confessed on numerous occasions to abusing children within the family and outside the family—and nothing was done. He made four different confessions on four different occasions to a departmental worker, but they were never passed on to the police for investigation.

I would like to read one line from a report of 18 July 1988 by Shannon Ballot, which was part of the review on the husband returning to the home. It says:

Should the children be re-abused, in view of the risk factors evident what is the department's culpability?

He did re-offend; the children were re-abused. My wife then lost all the children, and she was made a scapegoat. Her husband confessed to abusing the children before the care and protection order court case. Eight months later, it was up to my wife to go to the police to get her husband to go to them to be interviewed. He was charged and subsequently served four years in jail. As I said, further matters with regard to another child in this case are pending.

On 21 June 1993, Dr Ann Whitehead wrote her first letter to the then Department for Community Development and stated that she believed the children were at risk. She is a child psychiatrist and had one of the children in her care for a school term at the clinic. She believed that the child in her care and her sisters were at risk from two family members. She got no reply to that letter. In July 1993, six weeks later, she wrote again and, again, received no reply. On 17 November 1994, the children were apprehended and, depending on the child, kept in foster care for terms of between 16 and 18 months, with one child in foster care for four years.

Do things happen in foster care? In my opinion, yes, they do. I live with the evidence of child abuse every day of my life. I have four out of five kids; the youngest is 12 and the oldest is 25. All of them have been abused in one way or another, and I have to live with it—so does my wife and so do the kids. The youngest was three years old when she was abused and she still has nightmares to this day. We are woken up with the screams and the crying and we have to go in there and comfort her. That is partly because of what happened in foster care but also because of what happened from the perpetrator of these crimes. That is all I have to say. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Pritchett—In a nutshell, in this case basically, yes, the man confessed to abusing his own children. He did a jail term and then the department convinced the mother that he was rehabilitated and should be returned to the home. He re-abused and her children were then taken off her for neglect and for not protecting them from the abuser, which does not make a whole lot of sense.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Pritchett—I would like to just outline some case histories that have been presented to you, and obviously you have those notes so you would know them in far more detail. These are case histories of people who are not able to be here today so I would like to touch on them on their behalf. Do I give the surname of the family I am about to talk about? Is that considered appropriate?

CHAIR—Probably not, unless you think it adds to our inquiry.

Ms Pritchett—I am happy with whatever you want. This was a young family of five children and the youngest, the five-year-old, was found with a broken arm that had not been set for two days. All of them were being badly abused by their father in monstrous ways. He had guns at their heads, he deprived them of sleep and he deprived them of food. The 12-month-old baby was bashed—and this is in their own FACS file notes; we found out a lot about the abuse because of FOI and being able to get the Department of Family and Community Services files. He was struck 10 times, and he was only 12 months old, for not sitting on his potty. This man's wife, incidentally, died very prematurely after a long history of beatings. That is another story, but it does not involve care.

The children were apprehended and sent back by the court. They were apprehended a second time; again, for abuse. This time the department took responsibility for these children and, according to case notes, none of them were to be returned to their father. Access was to be extremely limited—half an hour or so every four months. That was to be supervised access. However, what happened was that Brian Burke came to power in 1983 and the Labor government came in. I have a letter signed by Mr Brian Burke as Premier of the state written to that father claiming that 'now the children are going to be returned' and that he is glad to hear how the father is going to get them back—which was totally contradictory to the case conference decisions.

What happened next was that the minister of the department—a Mr Keith Wilson at that time—called an interim review. That interim review decided that these children would go back. They did go back despite a department psychologist saying, 'If you send these children back, irrevocable damage could be done—psychosis even.' That was one week before they were sent back. Their college parents pleaded for them; the welfare officers pleaded for them; the social workers pleaded for them. We have all of this documented. But they went back. They were abused again a year later. Then a certain social worker was put on the case of all five children and given total autonomy over these children, and bad went to worse. These children were now placed in numerous foster homes where they were sexually and physically abused. Their cries for help were completely and totally ignored and they were threatened with being put elsewhere, which would be worse for them.

They were also—and this is recorded in a police statement, but the police statement has never been acted upon—taken up into the hills where a group of men were waiting for children to come through the door. We have an explicit design of this house and an idea of the location but we do not have the house, not yet. Apparently, and this is the description this boy made, the children were given drinks—and there were many children in various states of distress—and they were made very woozy by the drinks they were given. There was a bar at which men sat watching the children come in on the right-hand side and on the left-hand side there was a corridor with bedrooms going off on each end. The children were taken into these bedrooms. As I said, this is on a police statement, so it is an alleged abuse which has never been acted upon.

This young man and another young man placed in the same foster home have both gone to the police and made very detailed descriptions of the abuse from the two foster sons in one of the foster homes they were put in. Charges were actually eventually laid by the child abuse unit on behalf of both of them. It got to the DPP where he shut it down and refused to actually take it to court. Those young men are both very angry about that. I do not think there is a whole lot more I can say about that particular instance, except that the end result of that has been absolutely disastrous. These children were apprehended something like about eight times over. They went back each time. This man has not been charged—he has been charged with growing drugs, but he has never been charged with the abuse of his children.

Emma is another young girl who was put in Bridgewater Children's Home. You will actually hear from some people who were placed in Bridgewater who will give you their own story, but Emma is unable to be here today. She was sent to Bridgewater Children's Home, which was a massive home comprising nine cottages, an administration office and a public kindergarten. It was on six acres of prime rural land out at Applecross. She was sent to the home because the man that her mother was living with had sexually molested her twice. The first time the sexual molestation was reduced to assault and he was fined \$150. The second time he was actually charged with sexual assault and he went to jail for three months. Emma was in and out of Bridgewater because she was consistently sent back to her mother. Even after this man was jailed for abusing her, those children—and she was one of four—went back to the mother with the acknowledgment that this man was still in the home but with the assessment that it was necessary for him to be there for the stability of the mother. Emma's cries are: 'Why did they keep sending me back? My mother used to watch me being sexually abused.'

While Emma was in Bridgewater she made a police statement to say she was abused by two of the carers in Bridgewater. Not only was she abused by the carers in Bridgewater—and you will hear that that was quite a common occurrence in this particular home—but she was also driven to Kings Park and other destinations where the carers would actually hand her out to other men who also sexually abused her. She was considered to be somewhat retarded. Her and her children—and this is on their own file notes—were somewhat slow due to lack of stimulus as babies. The mother actually just stuck them in the cot and that is where they stayed. So the recommendation initially was that each child should be fostered separately and each one should be given an extra little bit of attention that would actually counter any of the retardation that had occurred due to the lack of stimuli. That did not happen and that decision was completely overridden by somebody else in the department who thought they knew better. Consequently, Emma ended up in a special school where she was then raped by the gardener. He was a convicted paedophile who was employed by that special school. He raped not only her but also another girl. In the education department that accusation goes right back to when the children

first made it; it is on paper and documented. That was reported to the school at the time and he is currently being charged with it.

Sue is another case. Sue is one of eight children but, when she was taken from her family, she was told she had no brothers and sisters and that she was alone. She did not know that she had brothers and sisters until she was an adult. She was really abused by the foster family. She was placed on a farm where she and another girl—who turned out to be her biological sister, at the end of the day; but neither one of them ever knew it—worked the farm. They slaughtered animals, they slept in the shed with the diesel fumes and they were sexually abused. She was made pregnant and had an abortion. The abortion was arranged. After that, she was placed in Bridgewater. In Bridgewater she was sexually abused—again, by the same carers that are named in other instances. She was also taken to destinations, primarily Kings Park, and handed to men to be sexually abused.

She now has a son, and, while we are talking about Sue, I will go into the area of her young son. As is usual in these cases there is an ongoing problem when these people have their own children. Recently Chris was taken from his mum and was bandied about. He was placed with his father and he was abused by his father. Finally his mum got him back—the two sisters, mind you, are still with the father—but once he got back to the care of his mother he was thrown out. So he is now handling a few emotional problems. When he was put in the school in the area where his mother resides he displayed problems, so the assessment was made that he should go into a special education and employment—EET—program run by Parkerville Children's home.

This is a program that has been built up: supposedly all these wonderful things happen. Disturbed children who are identified and taken out of public schools are supposed to have one-on-one counselling. They are supposed to get employment training, and they are supposed to get an education component on a one-to-one basis. This does not happen. The education component was run by a man who is not a qualified teacher—we found that out. Not only that, but the kids played computer games, so they did not get the education component. As for the employment component, that was basically working on the Parkerville grounds. It was jumping into icy water to clear the dam, demolishing houses, renovating houses, working putting up fences, clearing the land et cetera, for the benefit of Parkerville. It also included going into the streets with cans to raise funds for Parkerville.

Chris was then put into a TAFE. He travelled from the south of the river to the north of the river every day and did three months of TAFE work. Then he was taken out of TAFE and placed with a horseracing trainer at a raceway, where he was told that if he did not work weekends, start at five o'clock, finish at 10 and work public holidays he would be off the program in disgrace. Apparently this program is funded at \$4 an hour, which is paid to these kids from Monday to Friday. However, weekend, public holiday, early morning and late night work is not paid. This particular racehorse trainer did not give any extra remuneration for the extra work—but he did give a lot of threats. Chris was one of several young boys who were given to this man in order to do the menial work around the stables—feed the horses, walk the horses, clean the horses out. He was one of several young boys this happened to. Basically, complaints to the education department have fallen on deaf ears and, as I understand it, that program is still running and has been running for many years.

The King family are currently trying to get three young children back. They had four children taken off them four years ago. I have photographs and documents that say the children were arriving at supervised access visits with cuts and bruises. There are photographs of them. The supervisor has written a report to say that these children were arriving with wounds and bruises they did not have the day before. A priest attended, and he has written to the department to say that the children were arriving with bruises. That was ignored. The parents recorded the children's messages on the phone, and that was ignored. I heard one of those recorded messages, and I know the voice of the child. She was saying: 'Mum, I'm getting all withdrawn again. I've started to wet the bed again.' Yet in the department's reports it says that this child had stopped wetting the bed since she came into care. That is the total reverse of the truth. That child is now 16, and she has gone to the police and reported that the carer she has been placed with for the past four years has been sexually abusing her. Another young girl placed in that same care has also complained of the same thing, with the same details. They have also complained that they have seen the three younger children abused, but the department refuses to accept that that has happened.

The parents are still struggling to get these children returned. I went to a case conference recently regarding the 16-year-old. The 16-year-old has gone to her parents and demanded that she stay there, and she has been allowed to stay there. The other sister—the foster sister—wanted to be with her and her parents. She ran away and got herself over to Canberra. The department sent a welfare officer over there, forcibly took her out of the home with police and got an injunction for her to be brought back to WA, where she was again put in care. This girl complains of having been abused in five different foster homes. She wants a family. She found one, but she was brought back here and put with more carers.

That girl was secretly sending SMS messages to me and her foster sister in Canberra. She was saying, 'I hate it here. I want to come back. I want to be with you. I am not allowed to talk to anybody.' When she was seen in the court here, the court ordered that she be given a separate rep to talk to, but it did not happen. It was never arranged. Basically, she has run away again and is back in Canberra. When we went to the case conference, the person who chaired that case conference on behalf of the 16-year-old said that the 17-year-old, whilst being brought back here in care, did not want to talk to her. The SMS messages that she sent us and the family in Canberra were quite clear: 'I want out of here. Please talk to my separate rep. I'm not allowed to talk to anybody.' She most definitely wanted to talk to her foster sister. So that person who chaired that conference told an outright lie to the 16-year-old in saying that the 17-year-old did not want to talk to her. She did. She not only wanted to talk to her, she wanted to be with her. Currently, as I said, she has run away again.

This family has been threatened. They have this trauma, and they never sexually abused their children. The reason these children were taken from them was because it was assessed that the mother had Munchausen's. We have asked the department to prove their allegations of Munchausen's, and they cannot. The mother has produced doctors' records to say that she does not have Munchausen's, but they are ignored and it continues to be alleged that she has Munchausen's. She is also supposed to have handcuffed one of the children to the bed. There is no sexual abuse here, but a case was built up and the children were placed in a foster home where there was sexual abuse. Currently, this family is being threatened with legal action if they talk about the sexual abuse. If the two girls talk about it they basically leave themselves open for court action on the part of the department's lawyers.

They are just some of the people who cannot be here. I wanted to give you a bit of an overview of the things that are happening. I cannot cover everybody, but I am hoping the submission has. I would now like to introduce some people who were placed in Bridgewater so they can tell you first-hand of their experiences in this situation—not only in Bridgewater but in other homes as well, because no child ended up in one home; they were always placed in several. Lee, will you come up?

Senator HUMPHRIES—I assume these submissions attached to your submission relate to the individuals who will be coming forward to speak to us today?

Ms Pritchett—Some of them do. As I said, you have more submissions there than you will have people here.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Sure. When someone who has a submission in here comes up, can you identify which submission it is so that we can refer to it as they are speaking?

Ms Pritchett—Yes. This is Lee Gill, nee Aurisch.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is there a submission actually headed with that name in these attachments?

Ms Pritchett—I believe there is.

CHAIR—Are you Elizabeth Gill?

Ms Gill—Yes, I am Elizabeth. I am sorry: I have been called Lee for the last number of years. Thank you very much for hearing me. I was put in Bridgewater in 1981. I was 14 at the time. I actually ran away from home because I had been abused by my father and brothers. My father died when I was 10, but the abuse continued with my brothers. I realised that that was not a safe place and that my mother was not going to protect me, so I ran away from home and went to SARC. Eventually I got into Bridgewater.

When I was there initially Bridgewater was actually a nice place. I was in a cottage called Banksia. The group workers were polite and nice. I was still scared of everyone. I was scared of men generally because of my upbringing, and I spent many months being scared because the group workers would come in and out—they would go between two cottages and check up on everyone and make sure everyone was okay. I would hear that and even though no-one had done anything to me there at that time I was still fearful. I slept with a knife under my pillow to try to protect myself if need be, because I did not know these people.

Eventually, cutting a long story short, I got put into a cottage called Mallee, which was a teenager or working-age cottage. We were more separated from the rest of the cottages and we were not able to communicate with them. In the middle of all the cottages was what we called the stockade, where we would go and sit and smoke and be obnoxious kids. There was a smoking room in Mallee, so once we went to that cottage we were not able to associate with the rest of the world out there. Anyway, eventually, after a certain quite short period, one of the group workers there—his name was Robert Asplin and he was designated my group worker, so he was privy to all my information and he would write up reports on me and so on—and I ended

up having, basically, a level of sexual relationship. He was manipulative and so on and now I look back on it as an adult I see it differently from the way I viewed it as a child. He would take me to his house when his wife was away, and we went to Kings Park and Hyde Park, and if he was on night shift—there was a group worker there all night long and there was a boys' end and a girls' end to the cottage—we would go up to the boys' end during the night to this funny little room where we could be locked away.

Eventually, I could not cope with that either, and I ran away from Bridgewater—which seemed really illogical, because when I went there I felt that I was not safe at home and that the only place I could be safe was with these people; I felt that I was out of the situation at home and in a safe place. But the months went by and what happened with Mr Asplin just destroyed me mentally. I went home to my mother and said, 'You've got to get me out of there because I just can't cope.' It got brought to the attention of Andrew Marshall, who was a deputy superintendent and a psychologist—he was actually my psychologist at Bridgewater.

Eventually, when I left Bridgewater and we went to court, Robert Asplin was charged under the Child Welfare Act with contributing to my neglect whilst in care. He was found guilty. That was in 1983. For a number of years I carried with me the thought that I was believed—that the magistrate believed me. I had only given my evidence in chief and then he changed his plea, so it just went through and I was never cross-examined. By 1996 I had lots of questions, and no-one seemed to be able to answer them. So, under freedom of information, I got court documents and a limited part of my file from the department. I actually do not exist after October of that year in Bridgewater. I was still there from November through to February, but on paper I did not exist. That was when I was in Mallee.

My understanding is that Robert Asplin is not on record as having worked for the department, even though in the trials and so on it was validated that he did work for the Department for Community Services at the time as a group worker and so forth. There were all those things. Also, Ailsa Smith was the superintendent of Bridgewater at the time of the events about which I made the allegations against Robert Asplin. When I was still in Bridgewater I had given her documentation that he had written me and she had made up her own report as well about her belief in the validity of my claims. She had sent all that through to head office, but all that stuff had subsequently vanished.

Coming back to 1996, I got this information and it was brought to my attention that Mr Asplin was never actually charged criminally with what had happened; he was only charged under the Child Welfare Act. So then I went to the child abuse unit, and he was charged in that way and subsequently found guilty on five counts of indecent dealings while in care. So you have from me a valid and true documentation of what happened.

I thought Bridgewater was going to be my saviour. Okay, Asplin was an employee and it was not the department as a whole that did those things, but two years prior to abusing me he was told formally to stay away from another girl who was in Bridgewater. Ailsa Smith told me that. She is still alive today. She was actually at the trial. It seems that nothing was done. They became aware of it, there were little things that pointed to the idea that he might be a problem, but it did not matter. Ultimately, he saw that I was already damaged goods so it did not matter what happened to me. How does it not? That is really what makes me angry: the fact that it just

did not matter. I was a piece of rubbish and it did not matter if they screwed me up even more. That is all I have really got to say. Thanks.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Gill.

Senator MURRAY—Before you go, Ms Gill, I lost track of the sequence of events. You were born in 1966 and you went into care in 1981 so you would then have been fourteen.

Ms Gill—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Was that when the abuse occurred—when you were 14 or 15 years old?

Ms Gill—With Robert Asplin?

Senator MURRAY—Yes.

Ms Gill—It was when I was 15 years old. It was from November 1981 through to February 1982 that the abuse took place.

Senator MURRAY—I see. Do you know whether the court considered whether this man had abused other children or did it only consider your case?

Ms Gill—I do not know. It was only my case that I was aware of anyway.

Senator MURRAY—Were you aware whether he or others had abused other children in that institution?

Ms Gill—No, I was not.

Senator MURRAY—So you might have been the only person?

Ms Gill—I just knew about my case. The only thing I can say is that after I made the allegations and while I was still actually staying in Bridgewater I can remember a shutdown, if I can put it that way. The group workers were nice people—the female group workers. Once this all came out they all turned their backs and would have nothing to do with me. They sided with him and they believed him. It was like a gathering of arms. As a child, that was devastating. Some of the women there—we called them aunties and uncles and so on—had a semi-relationship with me. For them to turn away and not even acknowledge my existence was devastating. I only knew about what happened between him and me—that was it.

Senator MURRAY—You are now 37. This man was dealt with in the criminal system just a few years ago in 1998.

Ms Gill—Yes, that was the year of the trial.

Senator MURRAY—It strikes me that you are still badly affected by these circumstances. Are you employed? Do you have relationships?

Ms Gill—I am not employed. I am separated from my husband. I am going to a clinical psychologist. My GP describes me in this way: I travel okay for a while and then—if I could be so rash as to say—I turn to shit; I do not feel valid. I run and hide, and then I get back on track.

Senator MURRAY—In this state there is—as I am sure there is in other states—a mechanism called a victim statement. In other words, a victim is asked to tell the court about the effects of what was done to them and sometimes that allows for compensation to be made.

Ms Gill—I was actually compensated, through criminal injuries compensation.

Senator MURRAY—Did you make a victim statement?

Ms Gill—Yes, I did.

Senator MURRAY—Did that influence the compensation?

Ms Gill—No. They had to go under the legislation that existed when everything happened in 1981 and 1982. The legislation then was different. I had to go before a judge for criminal injuries compensation. The judge who made the decision felt that my family was also to be held responsible for the damage caused to me, but two of the people were dead and I could not do anything with them. Thus he put the compensation down to \$15,000—because of the fact that he did not feel that Robert Asplin did the total damage to me.

Senator MURRAY—Are you paying for the counselling that you are receiving or is the government paying for that?

Ms Gill—To be truthful, I tried to commit suicide at the beginning of October and I was hospitalised for a period of time. That is the reason I am going to a clinical psychologist. I am not paying for it; I guess the government would be. I do not know, but I am not paying for it.

Senator MURRAY—It is a sorry tale. Thank you, Ms Gill.

Ms Pritchett—I will expand on this. When this came to court in 1998, the carer made a victim impact statement. In that he went on about how badly Lee's accusations had affected him: he had lost his job and he had had to go and get retrained. But he had actually gone to various colleges—I will not name them—and had mixed with the students and teachers, and he had also gone into the scout movement. His brother has been imprisoned over and over again for abusing children in the scout movement. What happened in this particular instance was that the magistrate turned around and commended him for getting on with his life and for his contribution to the community, regarding the scout movement et cetera. As for the first hearing, the magistrate is actually recorded on paper as saying that he has sympathy for this man because of his close proximity to such a well-developed young girl! So it goes on and on in every aspect of every road that these people travel.

CHAIR—Thank you for that, Ms Pritchett, and thank you, Ms Gill.

Ms Pritchett—Also, this carer wrote love letters to Lee, which she produced to the lady running Bridgewater. Those letters and a report went to head office but, when Lee went to

freedom of information and ended up talking to an ex-Bridgewater carer, she found those letters could not be found. We pursued that, but the letters could not be found and the report could not be found. Initially she was told there was a fire; then we were told there was no fire. Freedom of information cannot find those letters and cannot find that report. As for the fact that he was a carer, there is no record of him ever being employed by the department. I will ask Julia Clarke to come forward.

CHAIR—Julia, would you like to say something?

Ms Clarke—Yes. From when I was young, my dad would emotionally torment me. As I got older and started developing, he would physically abuse me. Then I was raped by him, and subsequently I ran away from home. I was put into the care of Bridgewater. Bridgewater kept making attempts to send me home. Under the Freedom of Information Act I got some records which all described me as being promiscuous, scantily dressed and displaying myself in a sexual manner towards the male ‘uncles’, which I did not do, because I was too scared. I just was not like that at all. I was put under hypnosis on several occasions. I was seen by a psychologist who was an orange person. He believed in free sex, free love, nakedness and all that kind of thing, and that was basically all he used to talk to me about.

Then one of the ‘uncles’ there used to take me for drives, but he was rather blunt about what he wanted to do, so I would kick up. The same person had locked me in the pantry, but I subsequently kicked the door down. This was actually the second time I had been in there: the first time I went in, all I remember is being fed milk and cookies, and I do not remember anything for about two weeks after that until they told me to go home. I remember being dragged into a shower naked at about two o’clock in the morning. I remember having my own room, and a lot of weird stuff that I cannot really remember going on at the time. Then I was put into another children’s home called Ocean View. The manager at Ocean View—am I allowed to say his name?

CHAIR—We prefer not. Call him ‘Bob’ or whatever, if you like, but not his surname.

Ms Clarke—All right. He was Keith, and he obviously had a better understanding of how to wear young people down until they gave in, and he sexually abused me for eight months. He took me up to his house once and abused me there. Why couldn’t the department have removed my father from the house instead of making me go? It has destroyed my life. I have attempted suicide several times.

Senator MURRAY—Have some water, Julia. Just take your time.

Ms Clarke—I lost my children because I did not know how to—

Ms Pritchett—Are you okay?

Ms Clarke—Yes. It is still very raw for me, because I only met up with Mary and Janet earlier this year. I had never told anyone about it up until then, so it has been rather like a rollercoaster for me. I am on a disability pension because I just cannot function properly. I am on medication to try and keep me calm. I am in the process of having my father charged with rape. My sister and my brother are not being very cooperative. Actually no-one is being cooperative;

they do not want to know me any more because of it. My mother, once I went into Bridgewater, did not want me to go home. She reckoned the family was better off without me, so I have no family. I do not really know what else to say.

Ms Pritchett—Do you have a counsellor? Is there a counsellor available?

CHAIR—That is fine. Thank you, Ms Clark. Would you like to take a seat up the back?

Senator MURRAY—Do you want to answer questions?

Ms Clarke—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—There is one question that we need to know the answer to. In your statement it says the police were not prepared to take a statement.

Ms Clarke—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Why?

Ms Clarke—I do not know.

Senator MURRAY—What did they say to you?

Ms Clarke—They said, ‘We’ll take you to a social worker.’

Senator MURRAY—What age were you when this happened?

Ms Clarke—I was 14.

Senator MURRAY—So you were reporting a serious crime, and you are saying that the police refused to take a statement?

Ms Clarke—Yes; I cannot exactly remember what they said, but—

Senator MURRAY—What police station was it?

Ms Clarke—Gosnells Police Station—it is only now that they are taking it seriously.

Senator MURRAY—And you were 14, so that was in 1979?

Ms Clarke—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Were you accompanied or were you on your own?

Ms Clarke—I was on my own.

Senator MURRAY—Was the sergeant at the desk a male or a female?

Ms Clarke—He was male.

Senator MURRAY—Did he refer to anybody else? Did he ring anybody else?

Ms Clarke—He referred me to a social worker that worked in Gosnells at the time, who also did not believe my story or believe what had happened. He hated my guts and could not wait to get rid of me. The month before I turned 16, he told me: 'I'm washing my hands of you. You're out of here; you're on your own.' Then when I was 17 years old, I turned up back at Bridgewater because I had been severely beaten up. I was wandering around and did not really have anywhere to go. I stayed at a couple's place where her boyfriend attempted to sexually assault me.

Senator MURRAY—You were put into Bridgewater Children's Home because your father abused you.

Ms Clarke—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—So the department knew your father had abused you?

Ms Clarke—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—But they did not have your father referred to the police?

Ms Clarke—No.

Ms Pritchett—Can I say something here? Julia was made to go to her father and apologise for accusing him.

Ms Clarke—I had to apologise for lying.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you, Julia.

Ms Pritchett—This is Phillip, who will be speaking on behalf of himself and his brother who is present.

CHAIR—Just Phillip is fine? Is that correct?

Phillip—Yes, thank you.

CHAIR—For the public record, that is all it is.

Phillip—Thank you for allowing me to have the opportunity to talk to you. In 1979 I was nine years old and I was put into the care of McCall Centre. McCall Centre is a Department for Community Services home in Mosman Park. McCall Centre was effectively like a youth hostel. There were a number of kids in there and a number of different dormitories and rooms. They also had a school on the premises. So, not only would we live at the site, we would also go to school there. The school was at the back of the premises.

McCall Centre had two little rooms they used to call time-out rooms. Time-out rooms would be not much bigger than a toilet. They would actually be a little smaller than a normal toilet. They just had four walls, a carpeted floor, concrete walls, no light and a little window up the top—a very tiny window. If we were naughty, the group workers there would just come and take us and throw us into this time-out room. Sometimes we would be in there for as little as five minutes but I think the maximum time I spent in there would have been about 10 hours a day. There were other times when children were put in there in the evening, they were left there overnight and would come out in the morning. There was no toilet in the room. If we had to go whilst we were in there, we were made to go in the room. Because of the carpet, there was usually either faeces or a very bad smell within the room.

Another situation at Bridgewater was that, understandably, a lot of children had problems, which was why they went into care in the first place. The home had monitors because a lot of children had bedwetting problems. I had one of them as well. If the machine went off during the night, we were basically belted, our faces were rubbed in it and we were made to sleep in the soiled sheets all night until the morning. When we would line up in the morning to go down to the dining room, everyone who had wet their bed the night before was made to come past carrying their wet sheets in front of the other children and then go down into the laundry area and wash our own sheets.

I suffered various injuries. My brother is here today as well and my father is here. I was taken to hospital with a suspected broken nose. I have had nose problems ever since. I also had my right arm virtually nearly ripped out of its socket and I have problems with my right arm even today. Another thing was that, when my mum and dad came to see us, we basically were not allowed to talk to my parents. There was always someone around us. There was basically a room where we would go. McCall Centre had a little trampoline as well. If we went into the trampoline area or anything like that with our parents, there were usually a number of group workers around as well. Although I was never sexually assaulted in McCall Centre, we were physically assaulted, and sometimes quite seriously.

I actually went to the McCall Centre for I believe it was about a six-month period in 1979. Then I came out and went home with my parents. The reason my brother and I were put in McCall Centre was because my Mum found it difficult to cope. She had three children. So she went to the department. I believe my Mum was seeing department psychiatrists at the time. They decided that the best thing was to give my Mum some respite and they put my brother and me into McCall Centre. As well as me being injured, my brother was assaulted. It got to the stage, when we were locked in this little room—with the smell and no light, no nothing—that it would send kids stir-crazy. I have no other word for it. You just lost all faith. You just could not control what was going on with you. You would scream and yell and try and get some attention, but no-one would come and take you out.

When we eventually left McCall Centre, I went home. Again, my Mum was still in touch with department psychiatrists. They decided again that they would put my brother and me in for more respite. At that stage my brother and I were sent back to McCall Centre. At that time I think the numbers were full and McCall Centre could not take us on. This was in about June 1981. I was 11 years old at the time. From there we went to Bridgewater. We were transferred from McCall Centre to Bridgewater. Basically, we were put into Bridgewater and that was the last contact I

had with my parents in an open forum where I could talk to my parents for about five to six weeks.

I have prepared a submission for the Senate, which I have given to Mr Humphries. In that submission I have given details regarding the abuse at both McCall Centre and Bridgewater. I can only say that at Bridgewater we were treated as if we were at the whim of the uncles and aunts—that is what they were called. I saw some terrible things happen at Bridgewater, not only to me and my brother but also to numerous other children. We were made to do things. For example, there was one incident where my brother had had enough and ran away. He went down to the Applecross yacht club and got on a boat. He just wanted to sail away. The police were called.

The way it was set up in Bridgewater was that they had a number of houses. One particular house on the far left side of the main administration centre—the house immediately next to it—they basically called the discipline house. That house was quite terrible with the beatings, bashing, sexual assaults and everything else that used to occur in there. On the particular night that the police found my brother at the Applecross yacht club he was brought back to the house. I was pretty sure it was Tuart House we were in—we were at the very bottom. The houses were situated around an oval and there was a playground in the middle. When my brother was brought back, he was then taken away from us to this different house. When he came back, he was black and blue. He had been assaulted. He had been sexually assaulted as well. He was marked all over.

The problem was that, when we had to come back to the house, we had people standing over us all the time. We had an uncle and an aunty—there was usually one man and one woman per house—who would be changed. Sometimes they would look after a different house. In the evenings there was no-one in the houses at all. What they had at the central administration point was a system connected to a little speaker that was placed inside the roof of each bedroom of the different houses. If they heard a movement or a noise such as someone getting out of the house, someone would walk down from the administration centre and check up on the kids. That is what they advised was meant to happen, but it did not happen all the time. So there were incidents where children who were distressed and crying were left to cry all night. There were other incidents. For example, in the boys section of my room, a lot of us would basically get together and comfort one another because there was no-one else there to comfort us. The doors were locked at a certain time—there was no-one there—and they would be opened again in the morning.

Rather than go into the incidents of abuse, I will leave them to be read from the submission, if that is okay, because they are all listed in there. My case has actually gone to court, and I will come to that now. I got out of Bridgewater after about 5½ or six weeks, I think it was, in 1981. I was 11 years of age. I reported to the Department for Community Services from about the age of 12 onwards on what had happened at Bridgewater. I met up with various case managers at the Midland office. They would bring us in, they would talk to us, and they would try and organise counselling—but basically we were told to keep our mouths shut.

When my parents—my grandmother, my mother or my father—came to visit us at Bridgewater we would go out into the playground, but there was someone with us every time we met with them. We were warned beforehand that we were not allowed to talk to anybody or to

discuss anything that happened in Bridgewater. When the uncles and aunties used to take us away to various places such as Kings Park in the city and other things like that, we were told we were not allowed to talk about anything like that at all.

The only reason we left Bridgewater was that the day my brother ran away and was brought back to the house, my grandmother—my father's mother—and my father attended Bridgewater to see us and were told that they could not. My father created a little bit of an issue there. Because my father worked away, he was not always at home. When Dad came back on an R and R trip and found out that the department had basically given Mum respite and had put my brother and I into Bridgewater, he attended and wanted to see what was going on there. He made a little bit of a stink and was finally able to see us and the condition of my brother. He made various complaints and advised that he was bringing in the police and other things. Effectively, we were allowed to go home. So, all in all, we spent about six weeks at Bridgewater.

After that, as I said, I was contacting Community Services advising them what had happened. Community Services took it upon themselves to do nothing about it. They just basically tried to cover everything up. We were told in no uncertain terms that if we spoke about this incident there would be repercussions for us. I had to go through my teenage years with this issue, trying to deal with it. After Bridgewater, Community Services had some involvement with my family for a number of years and then basically we put our hands up and said, 'Please, no more.' From then, going through high school, I ended up seeing a private counsellor through my college. From there, I got the ball rolling and tried to pull away from Community Services.

In my submission are letters I have written to various parliamentarians in Western Australia. There is a letter there from Dr Elizabeth Constable. There is also a letter there from George Strickland. I took my brother and went and saw Elizabeth Constable. At the time, I was living in Maylands. Elizabeth sent me to see Dr Judy Edwards. That was in 1992. I was 21 years of age. With the help of Judy Edwards, Elizabeth Constable and George Strickland, we notified all the parliamentarians here in Perth. From that point I was calling for a parliamentary inquiry into abuse in institutional care. I believe there is a serious problem. I have seen it with my own eyes. I have been in the system. Not only that; I have also tried to bring it to the attention of Community Services, who just put their hands up and basically tried to whitewash it.

I want to read out a paragraph out of George Strickland's letter to the director of Legal Aid. I was trying to get some assistance from Legal Aid to do an inquiry. The letter reads:

Over the past few years both departments—

being the police department and the Department for Community Development—

have been involved in intensive operations inviting children and adults to come forward and make them aware of any abuse which they had, or were presently, being involved in.

The letter goes on to say that I had done this and that it now appeared that nothing was going to happen. It says that my life was shattered and that I was now trying to put it back together. George advised me that he tried on our behalf to get some things done. However, every time he tried to do something, the door was shut, so it created another problem: who was I meant to trust? I had not only been to the police and to Community Services; I was now going to my

parliamentarians. At the end of the day, I was 22 years of age; I had been through this and I realised I had no-one to count on.

I then sent a letter to Richard Court, who was the Leader of the Opposition at the time. Again, there is a copy in the submission. I then contacted a journalist at the *West Australian*, Norman Aisbett, and we went to McCall Centre and had a look at the time-out rooms. When we entered the premises someone got very edgy. They wanted to know who we were. When they found out that Norman was a journalist we were threatened and so basically we had to leave the premises straightaway. Although I had sent a letter to Richard Court I tried to speak to Richard Court on radio, but I could not get through one of his secretaries. I was told that they would phone me back. They did phone me back and I was asked to come into the government building at the time. Richard Court was the Premier by then. He had taken over, I believe, from Carmen Lawrence. I went in and had a meeting. I was taken to that meeting by Norman Aisbett from the *West Australian*. He sat across there and observed the meeting.

I have put in here a letter to Richard Court. There is a note at the bottom from one of his senior staffers—a senior correspondence officer. After that meeting, the *West Australian* asked questions and they were told that no meeting existed—although even in their own documentation there is a note from a J. Colin, I think, the senior correspondence officer. Norm got a little bit suspicious at that point and started to investigate further. From there, he took me to the Community Development building and I had a meeting with Roger Nicholls, who was the minister at the time. Norm again stood outside the door. He saw me go in. I think I was there for about 35 minutes. Norm asked questions and was told the meeting never existed. Norm at that point turned around and said: ‘I’m sorry; I was there. I took Phillip there. Can you please explain why you are now saying this?’

The problem is that there has been a complete cover-up within the department. This should not be happening, but, if it is, we should feel confident that we can go to the department and say: ‘This is happening. What are we going to do about? It should not be happening.’ I am 33 years of age and I have been calling for a parliamentary inquiry for years. Parliamentarians have been writing to me, saying: ‘I can’t do anything; the doors are shut.’ I then went to the Child Abuse Unit. What happened then concerns me. My cousin’s husband was a detective in the Child Abuse Unit. When they found out about my case, he was transferred out of the Child Abuse Unit and I was advised that they would not do anything because it would open a can of worms.

To get the police to investigate, I had to go to the Ombudsman; I had to go back to George Strickland, who wrote letters; and I had to go back to Elizabeth Constable and also to Judy Edwards. Finally I was sent to the Police Child Abuse Unit, and a meeting was arranged with the detective-inspector in charge. Two other officers and one lady officer were present at the meeting. I was put through what I can only call an interrogation. They told me, in no uncertain terms, not to report it and that it was not a high priority for the police department. They basically said that I was making it up. Even then, I had no support from the police. I found out through the lady constable who was investigating my case—statements were made to me, and these are included in my submission—and also from my cousin’s husband, who was there and was transferred out, that he was transferred out purely because of my case. I then contacted Premier Richard Court again. In another letter, Richard Court advised me:

I would like to assure you that reports of abuse are taken seriously by the Department and that where information is available which may assist you in laying charges, it will be provided to you.

I then made a freedom of information request through the Department of Community Development. I had a talk with a gentleman by the name of Jim Laffer, who is the advocate in charge of the area at Community Development. I was told that the Bridgewater files were missing—that they could not find them. I was told that although my family had some involvement with Community Services our file was very limited. I know from having prior involvement with Community Services and from meeting with them that there were stacks of information. The file was quite high in reports on different things that happened at McCall, such as admission reports from when I went to hospital for my arm, my nose and things like that, and also on the problems that I am still having with them today. I know all this information was there, but Community Services would not provide it. They provided me with a very small bundle of documents. Finally, I got legal aid approved and I made application for criminal injury compensation for the sexual abuse at Bridgewater. I believe that legal aid also made an application for the physical abuse at the McCall Centre.

At my hearing, Justice Kennedy asked me about my timing, because the records that the government provided showed that I was only in care for about 11 days. I said: ‘Your honour, that is wrong; there are more documents.’ I explained my time frame; I gave her my version of events. I told her exactly what happened—when I remembered going out of the premises, and the like. She ordered the department to produce its records, so it was held over and we had to come back on another day. When we came back, the department came in with a stack of records—the Bridgewater records that we had been told had been lost or destroyed had mysteriously been found. There was a stack of documents. In the end, they admitted that, yes, I was right; I was in there for that period of time. However, those records have now gone missing again, and I have never been able to see them, even though Justice Kennedy advised the department to produce them in court.

I was awarded \$25,000 in criminal injury compensation. I did not get much of it. It went on legal fees because, before I could get legal aid, I had my own solicitor at Corser and Corser in Perth. So a lot of my money went in legal fees. Unfortunately, what the government then did was, rather than turn around and say, yes, this abuse at the McCall Centre all happened, they raised the statute of limitations on me. They said that, because I did not file it within six years, I was statute barred and could not do anything. Basically, they just wanted it to go away very quietly. Again, in my submission there are documents in regard to that, in which the statute of limitations is raised.

From my particular case and from what has happened with my family—my family was destroyed in our early teens by this—I would say that there seems to be a culture of cover up within the department. Our parliamentarians—I am sorry; at the end of the day we have to have some faith in somebody—are elected by us, but I cannot get any satisfaction or answers through my parliamentarians. George Strickland is telling me the doors are closed; the police are telling me that this is going to raise a whole pile of issues and they are just not prepared to take it on, and I have got Richard Court telling me otherwise. I had Carmen Lawrence telling me that she was prepared to help me. Then, all of a sudden, she put her hand up and said, ‘No, I cannot help you anymore.’ I can guarantee to every one of you that this is a big issue. I have been there; I

have seen it, and I have seen how it has destroyed people today. I am thankful that my family and I were able to get outside help and try to distance ourselves from the department.

Quite frankly, even when I went to Jim Laffer and the department in 1992-93 and requested information, I received threats from the department. I was told that, if I had children one day, they would come and take them from me; I was told that they would do whatever they could to frustrate my family. I was 22 years of age—I am sorry—and that was after what I had been through. What process is there for us to go and report what is happening and then also to ensure that something is going to be done about it? I have gone to all of those people; I have gone to the Ombudsman, the Child Abuse Unit and everyone else and I still cannot get anywhere. You will note that, in Justice Kennedy's decision, it is quite clear what she believes happened and the conduct of the department. That is all I have to say. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Phillip.

Senator MURRAY—The superintendent at Bridgewater was Ailsa Smith?

Phillip—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—To your knowledge, was she aware of the punishment house?

Phillip—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—And what went on in it?

Phillip—Yes. When my brother came back injured, I remember talking to her.

Senator MURRAY—Were the deputy superintendents, Andrew Marshall and Graham Searle, also aware of it?

Phillip—I actually had a lot of respect for Andrew. He seemed to be more approachable.

Senator MURRAY—But they knew about that house?

Phillip—Yes, they did.

Ms Pritchett—The clinical psychologist at McCall would actually sanction the children being put into time out. So they all knew about it, yes. It was a common practice for discipline at the time.

Senator MURRAY—I am sorry; I am getting confused. I thought that was the McCall Centre.

Phillip—Time out was in McCall, yes.

Senator MURRAY—I am referring to Bridgewater.

Phillip—Yes. In Bridgewater it was also used as time out but not—

Ms Pritchett—Children were taken from all the homes and put into time out.

Phillip—In Bridgewater we called it the punishment house.

Senator MURRAY—You told us, if I understand you correctly, that that punishment house was also a place for abusing children.

Phillip—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—So it was a house for somebody else's gratification?

Phillip—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—That was what you were saying?

Phillip—Yes, I was.

Ms Pritchett—If I may expand on this just a little, when Phillip went to the Child Abuse Unit to try and lay charges on his carer, he had the uncle's first name, and he had a very vivid description of who uncle was. But, of course, in Bridgewater nobody ever knew—or it was very unusual for you to know—the surnames. All of the carers were known as aunty so-and-so or uncle so-and-so. He knew who uncle was by his first name and he had a very vivid description. But the Child Abuse Unit's excuse for not preferring charges—and it was publicised by Norm Aisbett, I think—was that they could not identify the carer. I have since given the name to the Child Abuse Unit because he is very easily identified on the Family and Children's Services files. Having taken part in case conferences and so forth, his name is on their own files. The difficulty in identifying this man was negligible. He could easily have been found. It was certainly a responsibility of the department to supply that name and at least to supply the documents that would have his name on it. But it does not happen. That is one thing.

I might say, too, that for Phillip and his brother the consequence of this has been absolutely devastating for both of them—to the point that, as little kids, they threw themselves under a car, hoping to die. At this current point in time there is Phillip's statement in at the Child Abuse Unit, which is still there, from 1992. And two others recently, as of about two years ago, have gone in to lay charges on the carers—same carers, same place, same abuse. The Child Abuse Unit have been sitting on this investigation for two years. I recently got an internal investigation into why nothing is being progressed and I was told by internals that they are still investigating.

Ms Stephen—Hello. I am glad you people are here to listen to what we have to say. In 1972 I got taken away, placed in Bridgewater, and that is where I learnt what cruelty meant, in every sense of the word. I was born in 1957, taken away in 1961 as a slave in my country—Burma. I came to Australia in 1968 as a servant. The immigration department told my parents that they were not allowed to treat me as a servant. They had to still treat me like a child. So they sent me to school and everything, but I got beaten up constantly, shoved under the table to eat, treated like a dog. But I am the chief's daughter and I am very stubborn. The more they treated me hard, the worse I became, the harder I became to be managed.

When I went to Bridgewater in 1972 I was a very uncontrollable child. I do not feel I was uncontrollable; I feel that if they had spoken to me—and also in 1972 my English was not good. I could barely speak Burmese. My native tongue is Arakanese. I cannot speak Burmese—a word of it. They gave me an interpreter as a Burmese. I had no idea. I just know that while I was there I was not treated fairly. I was caught. In Bridgewater at that time in 1972 there was a lot of Aboriginal kids. I got treated like them. I was no good. I am a left hander. No-one would believe or care what happened to you. Now I am 45, I finally made it a point that I am going to talk about this and not hold it in my system. So Mary was the first one I went to speak to.

In there, they used to give us—especially at night time—cordial, things to eat; like you will have supper. I do not drink cordial. To this day I still do not drink cordial. I used to see girls, after they drank that cordial, get all sleepy and all tired and I refused to drink it. For that, I used to be punished. I was put out into the compound where there was a play area. That is where I got kept at night-time. I did not care. It was better than doing what they wanted me to do, that I refused to do. On my record, when I got it back, it said that I am a troublemaker. They could not control me; they could not do anything. They could not do anything because they were abusing me. They were hurting me physically; they were hurting me emotionally. Most of all it was the name calling. I can handle anything, but damn name calling sits here. I am 45 and I have lived a life of sadness. All I ever am is sad. This time I will stop being sad and do something.

It is time that somebody took notice of children who have been there. We did not only get sexually assaulted; we got physically assaulted. If you did not do what they told you, they just shoved you around. You are a little kid. As a little kid, you do not know anything, so you do what they tell you. I know that many girls lay there in the dark, crying, with officers on top doing whatever they wanted. I was different because when they tried to do that I ran, screamed or did something. After you get hit a few times, you get very scared. I was in Australia. I had no mum, dad, brothers, sisters—I had no family. I could not tell anyone. They would not listen. Who wants to listen to a little nigger kid? Who cares?

To this day I truly thought that it was my fault for being born, for coming to Australia—just for being here. I am here to let you know that it is time to do something. It is time to stop this nonsense happening to children in care and for them to be treated with care, dignity and pride. I feel that none of us in 1972 received that. I was nearly 15 years of age and I could not speak a word of English. I did not know my parents and I was treated like that. I have been sexually assaulted—I will not even go into it. I cannot talk about some of it; I cannot bring some of it up even now. There are still bits of that with me.

There are times when I was put outside, because I would not do something. Why should I have been put out? Why should I have been made to sit outside—like I was a piece of shit would be one way of putting it. I felt that. I am 45 now and I have finally realised: I am not a piece of shit; I am a person. I want to be loved and cared about just like everybody else. I have come here to plead with you to do something about stopping this nonsense. I do not mean the past; I am talking about the future and all the kids going into care. Something has to be done.

In 1972 I ended up with malaria. During that time I was sexually assaulted. They said I deserved it. To this day I think: what the hell did I do to deserve this? Do you know why? I felt it was because I was born and that I came from another country as a slave. It is on my record. They treated me like one. I thought that when I came to Australia all that slavery stuff would have

gone. But it had not. For two or three months in 1976 when I got out of prison, I said, 'I am going to go forward.' When I hit 35, I realised I was not going forward. I was still hitting a bloody brick wall constantly. I have decided that if you know what has happened in the past, maybe you can help us to get on with our lives. Right now our lives are going nowhere, because we are sad. I am constantly sad. There isn't a day when I am not sad.

I am angry. I have finally learnt how to control my temper. It shows on my record that I do have a vicious temper. That is tribal. I come from a tribe which fights all the time. I recall a lot of stuff from when I was little. But here in Australia I did not have a childhood. I am trying to reclaim that by coming here and talking to you people. Maybe—with crossed fingers and with God's help—I might make it. Thank you very much for listening.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Stephen. You are very courageous.

Ms Pritchett—Paula, are you okay? I introduce Paula Noteboom.

Ms Noteboom—Thank you very much for listening today. I will just give a bit of my background. I was sexually abused from the age of two to the age of 12 by my father. The police knew about the abuse. He was abusing my sisters when they were nine. He still had custody of me from that time onwards. The abuse still went on. He had full custody of me when I was 12. Welfare knew about the abuse. The abuse happened every day. It was constant until Peter Bayman, who was a social worker, actually came to the school. I do not know how but I just said that my father was molesting me. It was the best thing I have ever done in my life. It was such a relief. He was sentenced and jailed for six months. I went back to live with my mother. She could not handle me. Nobody spoke about the abuse or anything. Nobody asked me any questions. It was all a big lie. It was, 'Nothing ever happened. Just get on with life.'

When I was 12½ or 13 I was moved into foster care. I cannot say the name at the moment because it is actually going through the police department. At that time, I was living on a farm in Marina. I was made to get up at four o'clock in the morning and milk 100 goats by machine and two cows by hand before I went to school. I was also made to clean out a large area where the goats had slept during the night, so there was a lot of manure and everything else. I was then made to go to school, which was about half an hour away. I then came back and did the same thing every night.

Then the sexual abuse started. I was sexually abused the whole time I was there. It was an ongoing thing. It happened every day. There was a lot of physical abuse, a lot of mental abuse and a lot of sexual abuse. I got broken ribs from him; I had my nose broken by him. I was not allowed to have any contact with the outside world. I was to catch the bus to school every day and come home. My social workers would come up and see me. They told them that nothing was going on. I would tell them how he was abusing me and how I was their slave and how I was up in the morning milking goats and everything else. Nothing was done. This went on for months. I was very sick for about two months. I was off school for two months with gastro. Nothing was done. The welfare department knew about it.

I could not understand at that age why I was just constantly threatened, why I was being abused. All my life I had been abused physically, sexually and mentally. No-one would ever listen to me. You talk to your case workers or your social workers—somebody to actually

confide in—and ask for help and they push you away constantly. They constantly push you away into a back corner. It is like nobody wants to help you. This went on for months—nearly a year—and then I was finally able to have contact with my family. I spoke to my sister and she came and got me out of there.

All I am saying is: please look into the system because the abuse is out there and somebody is just covering it up. It is just not fair. I have lived it all my life. I re-live it constantly, every day. I have two beautiful young girls now and I am so scared that something is going to happen to them because nothing is ever done—these paedophiles get six months in jail because the system is so stuffed. Everybody you try to get to help you just pushes you away. Please look into the system. Let us prevent something else happening—let us just save one child from being abused. That is all I have to say.

Senator MURRAY—It says here that you were eight years old. I presume your sisters were older than you?

Ms Noteboom—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—They were also abused by the father. They reported the abuse to your mother and to the police. It then says later on that you were sent back to live with your father when you were about 12. What did the police do? You were eight years old.

Ms Noteboom—Nothing. I am actually waiting on the records from the Princess Margaret Children's Hospital and for my DoCS file at the moment. I am in the process of getting them at the moment. He was charged but not sentenced at that stage. There were signs, at that age, that I was abused, but there was no proof. All my life I had been used to it. I was threatened constantly from the time I can remember. He had visitation rights to me every weekend. There would be somebody present; namely, his mother. She witnessed the abuse going on—the sexual abuse and everything else—and nothing was ever done about it.

Senator MURRAY—And did your sisters tell the police that they had been abused?

Ms Noteboom—Yes. My sisters had been abused; their friends had been abused.

Senator MURRAY—So this was in 1983?

Ms Noteboom—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—So the police were told by three girls that they had all been abused and they did nothing?

Ms Noteboom—Nothing.

Senator MURRAY—Just so that we understand, how much older than you were your sisters?

Ms Noteboom—One is six years older than me and one is seven years older than me.

Senator MURRAY—So you were eight, one was 14 and one was 15?

Ms Noteboom—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—And the police did nothing?

Ms Noteboom—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Which police station was this?

Ms Noteboom—Armadale. Like I said, I had grown up with it all my life—the threats, the abuse and everything else. You cannot say you become accustomed to it, but, when it happens from the age of two onwards, it is all you know. If I only knew what I know now back then. How much I had to learn.

Ms Pritchett—Paula contracted salmonella whilst working on this goat farm and—correct me if I am wrong, Paula—could hardly get out of bed for two months.

Ms Noteboom—Yes.

Ms Pritchett—She was dangerously ill. The doctor was extremely concerned because there was the potential that she could die from this illness. The doctor wanted to hospitalise her but was not allowed to. There was no permission given for her to be hospitalised because, of course, if she was hospitalised then people would have asked questions. She could have died.

Senator MURRAY—Ms Pritchett, could you tell us about the statute of limitations in this state? It is about the worst in the country, as the child migrant report says—

Ms Pritchett—It certainly is.

Senator MURRAY—I understand that it works from the date you first make a complaint, but if somebody like Ms Noteboom made a complaint in 1983 and the police did not act upon it does the statute of limitations cut in? Surely, if she made the complaint then, she has taken action.

Ms Pritchett—Molesting a child sexually is a criminal act. So, even if an offence occurred in the early eighties, the seventies or the sixties there is no statute of limitations to bringing your abuser to court for rape, indecent dealing or whatever it is. There is no statute of limitations as far as the criminal act is concerned. However, if you want to accuse the department of a lack of duty of care or an abuse of any kind then that has to be done within six years of the date that the abuse happened. So if you were abused as a three-year-old you have to make that complaint and go for retribution from the department by the time you are nine.

Senator MURRAY—But that is a denial of natural justice.

Ms Pritchett—If anybody has any more information on that, they can correct me if I am wrong. I think I may be wrong; it may have changed. I am informed that you have to take action against the department within a year of your actual abuse.

Senator MURRAY—Even if you are a child?

Ms Pritchett—Yes. So, whilst many of the children that had been abused in care are very keen to hold the department that placed them in these situations accountable, because of the legislation that has gone through in this state, it is impossible. You cannot do it. Most people who have been abused as children do not come to a place where they are dealing with it, can talk about it or want something done about it until they are in their 20s or their 30s. They cannot handle it as a little child. It takes many years for them to come to that place of courage where they are ready to face their abusers and do something, and then they find out they cannot do it. I might add that WA is the only state in Australia that does not have mandatory reporting of child abuse, which I believe is an extremely necessary move. We are the only ones that are resisting mandatory reporting of child abuse.

Mrs Lowe—In all of the other states you can apply through the courts to waive this time limit, but in Western Australia we have laws that are different from those everywhere else. We have a different Family Court to that which is everywhere else. One of the problems has been that you cannot apply to have the time frame waived, whereas you can in other states.

Senator McLUCAS—Is that a procedural thing? I think Ms Pritchett was saying that it was a legislative issue.

Ms Pritchett—I believe it has been legislated, yes. It is the law here.

Mrs Lowe—You have to ask yourself who puts up these laws here and who they are protecting.

Mrs Van Aalst—I am Jenny Van Aalst and this is my husband Theo. We are here to talk about what has happened to our son.

Mr Van Aalst—In about 1986 our young son started to develop antisocial behaviour, lashing out at us. He was expelled from school and committed crimes. He did considerable self-harm—

Ms Pritchett—Would you like me to say a little bit?

Mr Van Aalst—Shortly; no. He was lighting cigarette lighters until they were red hot and burning his arms and cutting his arms. It did not matter what we did. We took him to psychologists. With the medication from one doctor he tried to overdose at age nine, 10, 11. We took him everywhere.

Things just gradually got worse. He left home. We kept on looking for him, lying awake most nights at our wits' end. He was fined in the courts. He was sort of put through the system—the Department for Community Development and police became involved. He was given many work orders. One was a large one that required transport of some 50 kilometres away. The department was going to arrange transport. However, they did not do it, so we did two trips a day to take him to and from this. We took him in the morning and then picked him up in the afternoon. We covered some 30,000 kilometres. When it was raised later on with the zone manager, Mr Mike Hepburn, he was quite concerned about it, but nothing was ever done about it. But anyway, things just got worse and worse.

Mrs Van Aalst—They were supposed to organise it, arrange for that transport and all that.

Mr Van Aalst—His life had its ups and downs but thankfully friends and extended family were assisting us where they could.

Mrs Van Aalst—They were trying to help him.

Mr Van Aalst—The last place where he had his work order were quite happy with him. They ended up paying him in the end as a job, and they did not have to do that. They were very happy with him. However, the mum of another abuse victim phoned him. At the time we did not know what it was about, but apparently it was about some abuse that happened to him; they wanted to do something about the paedophile. That was enough to trip him up, and he started using alcohol and drugs and sniffing petrol. He turned from being a nice, polite, well-dressed boy to a dirty, unkempt person. Then, just when we thought things could not get worse, on 19 February 1994, as a passenger in a motor vehicle accident, he received near fatal serious head injuries. Whilst he was in hospital in intensive care, in a coma, and we were living at the hospital, we were told by his then girlfriend that Michael been abused by a Robert Ellis. She said that this had affected him greatly; he wanted to kill the person. In one way we were sort of relieved that at least we knew, after all those years, what had prompted our son to go downhill.

Mrs Van Aalst—And do these things, horrible things.

Mr Van Aalst—His girlfriend, Sarah, went on to say that Ellis had abused some 47 boys in our small community and that the Department of Family and Children's Services were aware of Ellis, as were the police. To say we were shattered would be an understatement. These people are supposed to protect the kids, and as far as we knew they did nothing. They made it worse because of their involvement with our family and their involvement with Michael.

Mrs Van Aalst—Prior to that there was another victim who had put a complaint in about this paedophile and was taking him to court. But the night the paedophile actually committed suicide, he phoned up to tell us what had happened so we did not have to go to court the next day.

Mr Van Aalst—That was much later.

Mrs Van Aalst—Yes, that was much later.

Mr Van Aalst—When our son was in intensive care, it was serious enough for us to live at the hospital for two months; that is how serious it was. However, the next day I phoned up the SARC at Princess Margaret Hospital—but they basically could not do much to help us. Because of his behaviour, Michael was getting counselling through the juvenile justice department in Bentley and he had an appointment the Monday following his accident, so we had to phone up to cancel that. The senior psychologist there suggested that we go in and see him, and that involved getting at least eight sessions of counselling for me and Jenny. However, some years later when we tried to get the records, they said that, because we were not actually clients of the department as such, they had destroyed all our records.

At the time of the accident or just after it, we basically were at our wits' end. The police did not tell us. They knew or suspected that Michael had been abused. A couple of months after the accident, while Michael was still in a pretty critical medical situation, Michael's former contact person with the department of development or whatever they like to call themselves came and

visited Michael whilst I was at work and Jenny was there. I was quite alarmed that they would stick their nose in. However, I phoned him at home.

Mrs Van Aalst—He had no permission.

Mr Van Aalst—He had no permission, no reason; they were finished with Michael. He assured me that he was only going there out of concern. That calmed me down a bit and I said, ‘Oh, by the way, we believe we know why Michael’s behaviour was so out of character’—and I did not go into details. He said yes, he knew. He went on to speak of 10 other victims; he gave me and Jenny the names of 10 other victims. He promised that before he was going to retire, he would see something through, have the paedophile charged and see that all the victims got compensation.

Mrs Van Aalst—To this day we have not seen him.

Mr Van Aalst—To say the least, at that time we had a bit of faith in him. Because we were so overwhelmed by the injuries of our son, we left it in his hands. Some six months later or so we made our appointment with him because we had not heard, and the department’s John Lever said, ‘Because it has been going for so long, he has been told to put it away.’

We then went to the then Minister for Family and Children’s Services, Roger Nicholls, in Mandurah and met with him. He listened to us, just like we are talking now. As far as I know, he did not tape it. He listened to us for about two hours. He said to me, ‘Look, put it in writing.’ So over a matter of weeks I did. However, at the time I thought that maybe if I said something or mentioned people’s names I could get sued. Upstairs from Mr Nicholls’s office there is a lawyer, and we took it to him for an opinion. The lawyer looked at the thing and said, ‘No, that is okay; you submit that.’ But then he blew me away by saying that he had heard stories about this paedophile. I thought: why weren’t parents told?

So I never went back to Nicholls with the report or with our statement. However, later on I did write to him and asked what he had done and basically he referred me back to the department. I have been dealing with the department for probably 10 years and cannot get much more out of them than the name. Basically they come up with all answers and nonsense—saying that they did not know. Then we nailed them down to admitting that they knew about Ellis in 1993. A lady made a complaint to the police about Ellis in 1992. There is no record of that.

Mrs Van Aalst—It is a disgrace.

Mr Van Aalst—I wrote to the Premier. First we went to the media. The Premier, Mr Court, came out and said yes, parents should be told. I asked for some compensation. The next day, he said that now that he knew a few more facts about the case—which was utter rubbish—he was pleased, happy and satisfied with how the department acted. I have tried to get an answer from the department and from the police.

Mrs Van Aalst—We are just at our wits’ end now.

Mr Van Aalst—Yes, at our wits’ end. Basically it just—

Mrs Van Aalst—goes on and on.

Mr Van Aalst—It just goes on and on.

Mrs Van Aalst—If this is protecting children—

Mr Van Aalst—As a response to the media, the department offered to fund a community building in our former town on a dollar-for-dollar basis, up to \$500,000. That building is being built now; it is nearly complete. They sent a couple of psychologists into the town. One of them is Jennifer Gurner. We went one time to see if they were ever going to do anything. She said to us that the parents should have been told.

I have been paying a solicitor to help us. We have spent about \$10,000 of our own money to get a resolution. A lot of those funds have been used to get some answers from the Department of Family and Children's Services, or whatever they like to call themselves. Most of the information came back with big cut-out sections.

Mrs Van Aalst—Nothing has actually been done.

Mr Van Aalst—No. I have worked all my life in fairly well-paid jobs. Three years ago, I became so ill I have not been able to work since. If victims want to claim compensation, they have to do it without a solicitor. If they do engage a solicitor, those costs are not reimbursed. However, my son, who was injured and is now in our permanent care, cannot do much.

Mrs Van Aalst—He cannot do anything.

Mr Van Aalst—But the compensation panel, in their wisdom, has requested now that he provide some sort of statement, so we are working through that now with a lawyer. We learnt later that our son had also been abused by an older neighbourhood boy in 1986. That probably did a fair bit of damage to him before Ellis abused him. Although the department acknowledged that they and the police knew about Ellis in 1993, another woman made a sworn statement and a complaint to the police about their lack of action. That was dated 1992. Sorry, my mind has just gone blank. They have come out with various things that they do not have to tell the parents.

Mrs Van Aalst—It is total rubbish.

Mr Van Aalst—I say that any decent person would tell somebody that this was happening to their child. Other kids out of the group have tried to commit suicide. Our son tried to commit suicide a number of times; he just destroyed himself. With the media's focus on it, they decided to investigate. But instead of doing it properly, they formed a panel at quite considerable cost—\$100,000-odd one year, a couple of hundred thousand the year after, I believe, and I believe it is still going on—calling themselves the Child Protection Council or something. This consisted of people involved in the department, so in essence it was like the fox investigating the fox—a bloody waste of money and time.

Ms Pritchett—This committee was formed as a direct result of the media publicity to do with this case, because over a four-year period those boys had been complaining to police and to Family and Children's Services about this one man's abuse. They were lured up to his property

and many of them were abused—as Theo said—and it ended up with 47 of them over a four-year period.

Mr Van Aalst—At least.

Ms Pritchett—Now, in that four-year period, something should have happened about that paedophile. There should have been some action about the paedophile. Even if he had abused one boy and the departments involved had taken notice of the one boy—or the two or the three—in the early stages of this and done something about it, then it would have protected the other 45 and they would not necessarily have been abused. But it just went on and on until Theo found out what had happened and blew the whistle in the newspaper.

As a direct result of this, the child protection committee was formed, at a cost of \$170,000 for the first year and \$150,000 per annum thereafter. That was supposed to be a committee to investigate paedophile activity. However, to the best of my knowledge there has never been a report on paedophile activity. There have never been any findings as far as paedophile activity is concerned. This was all in 1998. We are now coming up for 2004. That committee is still being funded and is now classified as advising to the minister. However, the reason that it was put together—and, as Theo said, it was put together with people that answered to the department or mostly answered to the department, and if not were state employed—escapes me. Basically, the true purpose of them escapes me. They have created a committee to do something that it did not do, but it is still being funded—to do something else. And there do not seem to be any actual positive results of any of it, and yet there is a lot of money going out the door there.

I would like to ask a question at this point in time. The department consistently changes its name. It has been the Department of Child Welfare, the Department of Family and Children's Services, the Department for Community Development. Think of the money and resources that go into changing the names, the letterheads and everything that goes into a department as big as this changing its name. Yet, when something comes out, the department cries: 'We do not have the resources. We do not have the funding.' But where is this funding going? There needs to be a very thorough investigation as to how the money the department does get is managed, because I believe it is totally mismanaged. There is a whole lot more funding that could be used for something on a positive level rather than changing the letterhead on documents.

I might add here too that the book *Rockspider* was a brilliant book, written by a head of a police task force investigating paedophile issues. That book talked of actual case histories. At the end of every chapter it gave parents warnings of what to look for. It gave insight into a paedophile's thinking; it gave insight into a paedophile's manipulative ways of creating their victims; and it warned parents how to protect their children. That book was banned from the shelves in WA.

Senator MURRAY—By whom?

Ms Pritchett—The government. You could not get it from anybody except the publishers, and I will name them: Hybrid Publishers. You can still get it from Hybrid Publishers. To the best of my knowledge that is currently the case. It has certainly been the case for many years. I have tried it. You cannot walk into a bookshop and ask for it. They cannot even order it. You can only get it from the publishers.

Mr Van Aalst—When the Child Protection Council finished their report, we tried to meet with the then minister, Mrs Parker. Mrs Parker fobbed us off to a senior staff member. I said, ‘No, I just wanted to meet with her,’ and we were told that she did not know when she would have enough free time to see us. However, we persevered and tried to get an answer or a copy of the report from the Child Protection Council. Even with the aid of the WA newspaper we were unable to.

However, we ended up corresponding with Mr Phillip Pental and also we had meetings, at the request of WACOSS, with its then executive director, Mr Shawn Boyle. He said the pressure was on Mrs Parker, as she looked like losing her job over this issue. I said, ‘All we want is answers.’ Mr Pental raised this in parliament a couple of times, asking for the report from Mrs Parker. Mrs Parker absurdly said one time that it was of such a sensitive nature that she did not want to release it. However, after a matter of weeks or months, she did so. When we saw it, it was just a couple of pages of utter nonsense—not cutting into the issue and what it was about. Shawn Boyle went onto state-wide television and said it was grossly inadequate. He then received a phone call from the government of the day to say that he should not have said that.

To this day, we look after our son and try to resolve this issue. It was only because Mary phoned us up last week about this meeting today that we turned up, otherwise for the last couple of years we have basically been absolutely stuffed by the system. I guess that is what the aim was—to fob us off. I do not know how they can live with themselves. That is all I have got to say. Thank you for your time.

CHAIR—Thank you for your time, Mr Van Aalst and Mrs Van Aalst.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can you tell us how Michael is today?

Mr Van Aalst—His head is injured.

Mrs Van Aalst—It is very serious still.

Mr Van Aalst—He has chronic health problems. He goes to woodwork rehab three times a week, where he makes things under supervision. If he does not take one lot of his medication, he will die within 24 hours. If he does not take another lot, he will die in about 48 hours. The care is constant. He understands about this stuff. Obviously, when the abuse happened from both people, he did not want us to know. We certainly asked him what was going on many times; we probably smothered him. Our focus was so much on him for so many years, but he never told me. But, when his girlfriend told us, different people that we spoke to—psychologists and that—said, ‘Don’t tell him, because maybe the shock would kill him.’ However, after some 18 months when he came home to us after being in the nursing homes and hospitals, I had my arm around him one day and I said: ‘I know what has caused all this trouble. You’ve been abused by Robert Ellis.’ He acted like he had received an electric shock, like he had been zapped. Anyway, over a period of time he said he was pleased that we knew. If we had been told before his accident, maybe he might not have been in that situation. A few years later, he told me about this other person who abused him many times in different locations, but as far as we know the government did not know. But surely parents need to be told, especially if they are having so much trouble, if government agencies know.

Mrs Van Aalst—It is in the best interest of the child that the parents are told if it has happened to them, so that the parents can go ahead and do what we need to do for the child.

Mr Van Aalst—How can we help them if we do not know? We just about bankrupted ourselves trying to get help for him. We were always looking for him. The police admitted to questioning Michael about the abuse—without us being there—

Mrs Van Aalst—He was a minor.

Mr Van Aalst—Yes, he was a minor. Their justification was to say that, because he was in Longmore on some charges, they did not have to tell us. The department said the same thing and said that he was in their care. Well, if he was in their bloody care, why didn't they bloody look after him? Damn them!

Senator HUMPHRIES—Why do you think Michael did not tell you about this?

Mr Van Aalst —He was embarrassed and ashamed.

Mrs Van Aalst—He has now told us how he felt at the time.

Mr Van Aalst—He felt his life had been destroyed.

Mrs Van Aalst—I think Robert Ellis would have had a lot to do with that, telling him that you don't tell others.

Mr Van Aalst —Yes, another youth said that if Michael had told his parents—if Michael had told us—he would have turned it around on him and made it so that Michael was at fault.

Mrs Van Aalst—Yes, but that is what I am trying to say: they were drumming things into the children.

Mr Van Aalst —Yes, they were drumming into them to be quiet and that 'it doesn't go past this place.'

Ms Pritchett—As the committee would know, paedophiles have a way of intimidating their victims into keeping quiet.

Mr Van Aalst —This was a nine-year-old boy.

Mrs Van Aalst—No, he was 13 then.

Mr Van Aalst —No, this was when he was with another person.

Mrs Van Aalst—When he was with the other people he was eight or nine, yes. Thank you for listening to us.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr and Mrs Van Aalst.

Ms Pritchett—Mr Chair, I will give you some more information. In 1998 parliament passed legislation, called the Child Welfare Amendment Bill 1998, to form a register. The idea of the register was that names, addresses, ages and nature of abuse would be pulled in from all the diverse agencies and put on one register under a manager. It was supposed to be under top security. The manager that was put in charge of this register was one of the social workers that have been the subject of what has come out today. He was a social worker many years ago and he was in charge of the five children that were consistently abused autonomously. In the years to come he was made manager of that register. At the time there was quite a lot of publicity because we actually did get into the media saying that this register was a paedophile's shopping list. Anybody getting their hands on the information on this one register knows the name of the child and they know where that child lives. They know the age of the child from the register, which indicates the school and the class that they are in, and the nature of the abuse shows where this child is vulnerable.

I am not sure about this, as I do not have any confirmation, but I believe that register is still in existence. It was piloted in 1996, along with the transportation act. That act has been recently passed; I think it was passed about 12 months ago. The transportation act covers the apprehension of children and says that a welfare worker can actually apprehend children without consulting the magistrate if the magistrate is difficult to get hold of. There is a redefining of the term 'parent', and children can be transported out of this state. We have evidence to say—and this is in most cases, in just about every case, that you deal with through Family and Children's Services—that paperwork goes missing or is destroyed, that records are not available or are completely destroyed. There was a man that came into the media saying he was ordered to destroy records on the migrant children.

Bridgewater closed because there was going to be an inquiry. It was a huge home. It was one of the first places in which children were put, when they were first apprehended, while the department decided what they were going to do with them. The shadow minister had had so many complaints through the early eighties that at that time he called for an inquiry. He actually got a parliamentary standing committee to do an inquiry. However, as I said before, there was a change of government, so that inquiry as it was planned did not happen. But the department called its own inquiry. It was called 'the review'. It was supposed to be independent but it never was independent: we have a list of committee members and all of them link back to the department. That was a huge review, at huge cost, looking at all the welfare social services, which, according to the newspapers then, were to be reviewed along Marxist lines, according to new policy along the lines of Marxism.

I have two letters from two carers who said that when Bridgewater closed they were ordered by head office to burn all the running sheets and all the case carers' notes on the children that were in their care. That is absolutely, totally against the Child Welfare Act, which says that records are to be kept. There are two letters from two different carers, in their own handwriting, which say that they were ordered to burn all the running sheets of the home and all of the carers' notes about the children that were allocated to them.

CHAIR—Did they say who ordered them to do that?

Ms Pritchett—Head office told them to.

CHAIR—Who in head office?

Ms Pritchett—No names were mentioned. It was just that those were orders had come down to burn those records with the closure of the home.

CHAIR—So it was someone in head office whom they do not name or they did not know?

Ms Pritchett—They did not name them. They may have known them, but all I can go from is what is on the letters that I have in my possession.

CHAIR—Did they tell you why they were told to destroy the files?

Ms Pritchett—No. I have not spoken to the people directly, but I have possession of the letters that they wrote.

CHAIR—Who did they write the letters to?

Ms Pritchett—They wrote to Bob Asplin. You heard the evidence from Lee. When she brought her court case to court, he wrote to these carers to ask what had happened to the records. I am assuming that he was worried about the letters that he had written, which he knew had been sent to head office. He was writing to two of the other carers to say, ‘What’s happened to the records?’ This was their response to him: that they were told to burn them.

CHAIR—Wouldn’t that be in his interests in that case?

Ms Pritchett—It would be. It was in his interests, but he was obviously doing the investigation to see if there was any chance in this court case that those letters could appear. He was assured that there would not be any chance of those letters appearing.

CHAIR—He would not have asked the question if he knew they were destroyed, would he?

Ms Pritchett—Not if he knew they were destroyed, no. He obviously did not know.

CHAIR—I am trying to find out whether—

Ms Pritchett—I am probably not making myself too clear.

CHAIR—It would have been in his interests for those documents to be destroyed, but he did not know about them. So who was being defended by—

Ms Pritchett—He obviously did not know what had happened to the records of the home.

CHAIR—I am trying to find out who was being defended by the destruction of the documents if, in fact, someone like Asplin was there.

Ms Pritchett—The destruction of the documents would have been in a general sense. He was not the only person who was abusing. There were multiple abusers in that home. The burning of

the records would have been to make sure that no disclosures were made for any of them. He just happened to be one of them. But when this case came to the court in 1998, I presume he was a bit scared that the records of those love letters he had written to Lee could suddenly appear in the court. He needed to suss out if that was a possibility. The two carers responded to him by letting him know that those running sheets and case notes had all been destroyed—that they had been ordered to burn them. Those two letters came into our hands through the court disclosures.

The transportation act that has been passed here is of great concern. You can look at aspects of that and aspects of the burnt and destroyed records and the general case histories that pertain to the department and their assessments. For example, if we go back to an assessment in another court case, the one of the Kings, it is on report that the carer washed the girl's mouth out with detergent. On the report, that is considered inappropriate parenting, but it is not considered abuse. We have a double standard. There is a standard here for parents and how they are to treat their children, and there is a standard also for carers and the things that are permissible, which are not considered abuse. In my mind, making a child drink a cup of detergent to wash their mouth out because they have said something inappropriate is abuse. Any parent would be considered to be abusing their child—but the carers are not. That is just considered inappropriate.

The department's idea of substantiated abuse is considerably different from what we understand by the terminology 'substantiated'. Janet will probably go into that a little more in her submission. Substantiation can take on all sorts of connotations as far as the department is concerned—certainly not the one we consider to be proof. On the subject of the transportation act, I would like to invite Steve Box to give a submission. He was a victim of transportation some years ago and he lost his two baby children. Because of his case the legislation was changed so that children would not be transported out of the state. Here, 20 years later, that legislation is regurgitated and, again, a bill is to be passed through the house. I can show you something that talks about creating a register. It says:

Considerable literature on the use of registers in other parts of the world was made available to the Panel.

That was the panel investigating registers. It continues:

The more recent literature indicates considerable disillusionment with issues relating to civil liberties and to the longterm effectiveness of the registers.

It says a review pointed out that they were:

... likely to "induce moral panic and deflect resources from where they are most needed and become ends in themselves."

This was a ministerial panel appointed by ministers to look into registers. This information is readily available. I cannot understand why a lot of money is spent on reports such as this and yet the department comes out with legislation for a register. The information is clearly available that they do not work. They have not worked in other countries where they have been tried. As I said, the transportation act has been totally regurgitated. It was found to be extremely faulty and extremely dangerous. It left all sorts of loopholes for abuse, and yet it has been regurgitated in later years. I introduce Steve Box, who will explain a little about what happened to him.

Mr Box—On the morning of 31 May 1980 I was a husband and the father of two sons, aged 22 months and two months. I took them to my mother-in-law's for lunch on the Saturday, which was customary. I then went on to a sporting event. When I returned in the afternoon I was no longer a father. My wife and two sons had disappeared and my mother-in-law denied any knowledge of their whereabouts. I attempted to report them to the local police station as missing persons. The following day I was telephoned by police and told that, if I went anywhere near my mother-in-law, I would be arrested.

It transpired that my wife had gone to a women's organisation, which had then gone through a women's refuge; an application had been made for funds to leave the state; the department had called for substantiation by an outside person; and a letter was written by a member of the women's organisation who had no qualifications whatsoever to deal with these types of events. The welfare officer who dealt with the case also had no qualifications whatsoever. It took me three months to find out where my children were—that was via a private detective. The only contact I had was from a woman who described herself as a social worker. She would not talk to me; she would talk only to my mother. All she said was, 'Your children are safe and well.'

I went to Victoria. I flew over there to see my wife to try and work out what the hell was going on. I saw my children in a solicitor's office for five minutes. I did not see them for another 17 months. My wife made allegations against me which have never, ever been substantiated. The department has told the state Ombudsman—there was a state Ombudsman's inquiry—that, at the time of the application, it was urgent and they did not have time to do an investigation. The Ombudsman queried that by saying that she could have been put in a safe place until an inquiry was done. The department again claimed that there was not time to do an investigation prior to shipping her out of the state and it made no investigation after the fact. She was shipped out of the state, then nothing.

The next investigation that the department made was when the state Ombudsman became involved. The director-general then started going to various people trying to get some statements to justify the removal of my children. The welfare officer involved made a statement to the director-general. This is the way welfare manipulates situations. This welfare officer wrote that he rang the Fremantle Police Station to verify my wife's statements. They made a statement that a police officer in a police car—I am glad they do not drive pizza vans—was called to our home. He says there was a firearm involved. This makes me look like some crazed gunman.

The actual fact was that, in 1978, three years prior, I had been convicted of having half-a-dozen unlicensed firearms. But let me put that in context. I have on four occasions represented Western Australia in state, national and international competitions. The firearms I had ranged from 400-year-old matchlocks down to some more modern firearms which were innocuous, in actual fact—not in working order. Certainly, I was convicted. I was fined \$2 and \$4.10 in costs, and the firearms were awarded back to me. That makes Ned Kelly look like a bit of a wuss! But it is used against me.

The director-general then put in his notes that, at the time of the arrest, I had something like 50 firearms in my possession. That is very true. He also says that he is not saying that I would use those firearms but that I was capable of using firearms. What he does not say is that six of those firearms belonged to my wife, probably 20-odd belonged to me and the rest belonged to state firearms associations which trusted me to be the custodian of those firearms.

There are other things raised in documentation that I have under freedom of information. Freedom of information, to me, means that a government department is just free to give you documents that do not implicate them too badly. I asked for documents under freedom of information. Certain documents were supplied and other documents were not. I appealed. A document was then produced by the FOI commissioner which lists all of the documents—those documents that were supplied and those documents that are in contention.

Amongst the documents that I did receive under FOI, there is mention of statements from my mother-in-law and brother-in-law, supporting the wife's allegations. Yet in that list of documents supplied by the FOI commissioner, those documents are not even mentioned, let alone supplied. So the department has this propensity to be able to produce magic documents that support their case but that do not exist.

Other documents were referred to. There were documents that I sent off to the review in 1983-84. I got two letters back from the convenor of that review, both saying mine was an unusual case and they were very interested in it. Under FOI, I find that Barrister Kennedy, now Magistrate Kennedy, had said that my submission was unsubstantiated, yet it contained a copy of the Ombudsman's review, which supported what the department was doing. My submission was withdrawn from the review without my knowledge. It was magic: documents which condemn the department suddenly disappeared. They held their review and everything was sweet.

Amongst the documents that were supplied under FOI, there is a document where the director-general of welfare had a meeting with the chairman of judges of the Family Court, specifically to discuss my case. I wrote to the Family Court to find out whether there is any other documentation pertaining to this meeting, and I was told that the Family Court simply does not have the time or the resources to search for those documents. It is just swept under the carpet. But this is undeniable evidence of the interference by Welfare.

Another example is that once the Ombudsman's review was under way and everything was going to go before the Family Court, Welfare wrote to my wife's solicitors for copies of documentation. They also wrote to the district court for any records of criminal activity on my part. Obviously, because there is documentation there from her family, that side of the fence was investigated. Nobody from my family was approached to give any evidence. If the department cannot produce documents that support it and destroys documents that condemn it, they will assassinate the person's integrity. I suddenly found myself confronted by two officers of the Protective Service—what is the full term?

Ms Pritchett—State?

Mr Box—No, federal.

CHAIR—It will come to you. Just keep going.

Mr Box—I was interviewed at my home about a person that I knew by the Protective Service's counter-terrorist unit. They questioned me about a bloke that I knew that was having problems in the Family Court. Fine. Ten days later I was asked to go into East Perth to be interviewed again. The same questions were asked. Then it was dropped on me that the real reason that they had me in there for questioning was that they had found that I had a plan to

assassinate a Family Court judge. That is character assassination. There was never any such thing. I wrote to the Protective Service and asked who made the allegation and which judge I was purportedly going to assassinate. Of course, they would not tell me. That sort of thing just gives me the strength and the courage to carry on, because I know that when an accusation like that is made the other side is running scared.

Because of my case and the Ombudsman's report, a story was written up where all of this interstate transportation was to stop unless there was consultation with the husband and father. Within months of that coming through, a lady friend of mine at the time rang social security welfare—which was apparently a union organisation at the time—and put over a bit of a story. This woman from the organisation was quite happy to organise transport and an air fare out of the state. My lady friend said, 'But wasn't it legislated that the husband had to be approached first?' The other woman's reply was: 'No. We never approach the husband. It is a cardinal rule.' So much for dads and husbands—you do not count.

Ms Pritchett—These two boys are now adults. They were babies at that point in time. One of Steve's boys has chosen to live with him now. He has come to Perth and he is living with his dad at present. He is in the Army and he is now going into the police force. The other son is in constant contact with Steve. That is to his credit. He worked two or three jobs to make sure that he maintained contact with his children. He paid their fares to come over here. He paid for the mother's fares and her legal bills. There were all sorts of things that he was required to do in order to have access to his children. He worked two jobs for a long time to be able to cope financially with the air fares to see his kids and with giving them some sort of quality time when they were over here. The two boys now really want nothing to do with their mother because their mother was abusive.

CHAIR—Is there anything you would like to say in conclusion, Mr Box, because we have to move on?

Mr Box—We have seen people here today who are in pain, who are in agony. They are not actors. They are suffering. I am going to come tomorrow because I want to see the other side of the fence. They are past masters in deception. This is an opportunity for you to drive a stake into this vampire and kill it. I do not want to come back here in 20 years time and see similar people to the Van Aalsts and the other people who have given evidence today going through the same agony. It has to stop, and it has to stop now. It has too big an impact on society.

I have had friends in exactly the same situation. One bloke, his children were taken from him in 1978; he suicided in 1991. Another one, whose children were taken in 1978 also, has not had any word of his children to this very day. I have come through; I have still got a sense of humour, I love life, I love my kids, but I am not going to sit back and see my kids and my grandkids or any other person go through what I went through and what these other people are going through. It is going to stop, isn't it?

Ms Pritchett—I have got here, and this was included in my submission so I am sure you have got a copy of it, an article featuring Andrew Patterson, who was in the WA police Child Abuse Unit. He was made head of a paedophile inquiry team. He is currently interstate; he had to leave the Child Abuse Unit. He came out recently, in September 2002, and said he had to leave the Child Abuse Unit. The article said:

Mr Patterson said at the time he had compiled evidence that proved paedophile rings were active in the state.

Two years later he was ordered to hide child pornography statistics and disguise figures requested by the then state Opposition, he claimed.

“It would appear that people in high places did not want the pedophile team to exist,” Mr Patterson said.

“The team was starting to look at pedophiles in high levels in the community,” Mr Patterson said. “It is speculation, of course, but why would you get rid of a team that is doing a good job locking up crooks?”

“My view is that is why I was forcibly removed from the unit in 1998.”

I have contact with this man. Should you want the telephone number to make contact with him, I can give it to you. I would recommend that you do make contact with him because he states that he has evidence of organised paedophile activity here; he worked in the police force, he certainly would know. He would also be a signatory to all sorts of secrecy clauses, but I believe that there is a way around that in a parliamentary inquiry.

The inquiry that he was ordered to falsify statistics for was the National Crime Authority’s inquiry into child abuse. Needless to say, at the end of the day the National Crime Authority’s report came out and said that there is no organised paedophile activity; there is no organised pornography activity in the state. This newspaper article, to me, is horrendous. To say, ‘I was made to lie to that inquiry and I do have evidence of organised paedophile activity and I’ve been told to falsify that evidence to that inquiry,’ which of course ended up negated, is horrendous. It did not cause a ripple here, not a ripple; nobody could care less.

One of the people on the committee of the National Crime Authority got into parliament, and he is on *Hansard* saying he is fully expecting—this is Paul Filing—a huge disclosure. He thinks a Pandora’s box is going to be opened up here. At the end of the day, he lost his seat; nothing happened. This man, when he was in parliament, put out all sorts of media releases: ‘Filing says Family and Children’s Services culpable,’ ‘Government departments help paedophiles,’ ‘Is there a deal, Filing says’. Mr Filing, who was on that committee, knows that there is paedophile activity operating through the welfare services, Andrew Patterson knows that there is organised paedophile activity operating through the welfare services, and it seems the state is completely oblivious to these allegations. They really do not count for anything very much. So with that I would like to introduce the next witnesses—by the way I might have misled your hopes a little bit, because we have got Leo and Sue—

CHAIR—What we will do, Ms Pritchett—

Ms Pritchett—You will take a break?

CHAIR—We need to have a few minutes off.

Ms Pritchett—Yes, sure; I was just going to say that there is an in camera witness too.

CHAIR—Yes, I know that.

Proceedings suspended from 4.39 p.m. to 4.55 p.m.

CHAIR—Ms Pritchett, who will speak next?

Ms Pritchett—I invite Leo McVeigh to speak to the Senate. He has been here for quite a while. It appears he is not here. While we are waiting, I invite Sue McGee to speak to the Senate.

CHAIR—Over to you, Ms McGee.

Ms McGee—Firstly, I would like to explain that several weeks ago I sent my submission to Ms Pritchett via email and it did not arrive. It was only yesterday or the day before that she let me know that it was possible that I could be speaking, so I am in one hell of a mess here and I hope you will bear with me on it. My daughter lost custody of her child, aged four, in 2001, and the department of families played a big part in that. I have with me a transcript from one of the caseworkers in the trial. I have letters and records from FACS that were given to us at the trial.

My grandson was quite happy going with his father every weekend. Then at about age two-and-a-bit he started screaming that he did not want to go. It was not long after that that he disclosed that his cousin was inserting a toothbrush into his anus. Then his father came to pick him up one day, and he screamed blue murder. Several occasions after that, he would run like a frightened little animal and hide. So that is when we got in touch with Family and Children's Services—at that point we did not even know they existed.

A caseworker came down approximately a month after we reported this—it was simply to get to know him. On that day, as she was leaving, my grandson was outside on the trampoline and he simply opened up and made a complete disclosure to her, and she was quite shocked. She said, 'Well, we are not going to have to do a formal interview. I have enough evidence here to take it straight back to my supervisor.' So we waited and waited for a reply, and about two months later we got one saying: 'It is unsubstantiated.'

He continued along the lines of being frightened to go, and was screaming. We kept reporting, and they opened and closed the case three times. I have here a copy of a document from one of the meetings. Somebody in charge of Family and Children's Services—I will not say the name—said he believed that inappropriate sexual behaviour had occurred. Unfortunately, FACS seems to white out a lot of material, so you cannot read it all. The document says:

Since August 1999, there has been an extensive history of contact by the maternal family with this department. This is outlined in a file summary, which is attached. On 22 August 2000 a meeting was held between the caseworker and senior officers in the zone, at which time it was agreed that FCS would not investigate further allegations raised by the maternal family, based on the belief that many of the referrals received are made as a result of the highly conflictual Family Court battle in which the parents are currently involved. However, a decision was subsequently made to investigate the referral dated 22 August 2000, as the allegation differed to those already investigated in that, for the first time, the child's father was cited as the possible perpetrator.

Prior to this, my daughter and I were called into their office and told that, if we made any more allegations, the child would be made a ward of the state. They even say here that Ms McGee contacted the crisis care unit to express concern about contact between the child and his father.

At that stage, I had no idea that crisis care had anything to do with Family and Children's Services.

They also stated that, when my daughter went through the IVF program, she conceived twins and one twin died shortly after birth. In another report, they stated that the child died just prior to birth. In fact, my daughter miscarried one of the twins when it was eight weeks old. They also stated that, when my daughter left her husband, I remarried. That is not true; I actually remarried one year after my daughter married. I have here numerous letters which my then husband had written to different people within the department, which I am happy to leave with you.

I will now speak about one of the case interviews, which was held in Rockingham. The caseworker, whom I will call 'K', and the child, whom I will call 'A', continued to play Lego. K asked the mother to leave the room, as A was engrossed in playing with the toys. The mother tried to leave. The child became very clingy, but she managed to get away. A grabbed some Lego toys. Then K asked A some questions. The following details are taken from the transcript of the interview:

K: What do baddies do?

A does not answer, and continues to play.

K: What is under the baddies hat?

A: Don't know

K then places the jig saw puzzle of a child in front of A.

A: It's a boy.

K: How do you know that? What's different?

A: Don't know

K: What's this called? (pointing to the head)

A: Head

Then she points to the arm.

A: Don't know

Then she points to the hand.

A: Hand

It continues on to foot and toes. She then points to the groin area of the diagram and asks the child what that is called.

A: Shorts

K: What is inside of the shorts?

A: Pants

K: Under what is inside the pants?

A: Legs

The caseworker then points to the chest area.

K: What is inside the shirt?

A: Tummy and singlets

... ..

K: What do we wear under our pants?

A: Jocks

K: and what is under the jocks?

A: Willowese ... and bum.

K: Where is the willowees?

She is asking the child to show her on the jigsaw.

A: At the front and points to the groin area on the jigsaw

K: Do boys have willowees?

A: Yes

K: Do girls have willowees?

A: Yes

The child then points to a new puzzle which details emotions and facial expressions. The caseworker points to each of the expressions on the puzzle and asks the child to state what they are. He responds correctly—happy, sad, silly, scared.

K: Have you had a scared face?

A: Yes.

He shows the caseworker.

K: Who sleeps at your house?

A: Mummy and me

K: Do you sleep any where else?

A: At Daddy's

A: R—

That is, his cousin—

sticks his finger up my bum.

K: Who told you that.

The child says R did.

K: Did Mum or Nanna tell you that?

He does not answer. At this point I would like to add that I am not known as Nanna to the child; I am known as Grandma. K then gets a teddy and asks the child if the teddy is pretend or real.

A: Pretend.

K: When [R] sticks his finger up your bum is it pretend or real?

A: Real

K: Did mum or nanna tell you what to tell me?

He does not answer.

K: Do Mum and Nanna tell you stories?

A: Yes, if little boys go on roads they get run over by cars.

K: Who told you that you had a willowwees.?

A: Yes, mummy (remainder undecipherable)

K: Who tells you about willowwees?

A: This girl went on the road (undecipherable) ... and there were no guards.

K: What happens when you stay at Dad's?

A: Don't know.

K: Does dad have a willowees?

A: A Wilber

K: What does that look like?

A: Has hair on it.

K: When did you see Dad's wilber?

A: When dad and I went... (undecipherable)

K: When did you see Dad's wilber?

A: No answer

K: How did you see Dad's wilber?

A: No answer

K: Does dad walk around the house with no clothes on?

A: Yes

The caseworker then introduces the anatomically correct dolls to the child.

K: Can you show me where the willowees is?

A: Under the pants

K: Show me on the doll?

A: Under the pants

The caseworker then undresses the dolls and the child points to the undeveloped doll's penis and advises that this is the 'willowees' and points to the developed doll and explains that this is the 'wilber'.

K: What do Wilber's do?

A: Wees on my hand.

K: Does daddy do wees on you?

A: Hand

K: What colour is the wees?

A: White

K: What colour is your wees?

A: White

K: Where does this happen?

A: At dad's

K: What were you wearing?

A: No clothes

K: Where were your clothes?

A: In the bathroom

K: What happens when dad does wees on your hand?

A: Like everything.

K: Any one tell you to tell me that story?

A: Nanna

K: What did nanna say?

A: Don't know

K: Do you like seeing Dad?

A: No

K: Why?

A: When daddy do wees on my hand

K: Does anyone else do wees on your hand?

He names a cousin, paternal grandmother and another cousin. The interview continues:

K: When [R] does wees on your hand what colour is it?

The child answers 'blue'. She asked about everybody else's. One answer he gives is 'green', looking at a green Lego in front of him. The interview continues:

A: Is [S]—

another cousin—

an big or little person?

A: Little like me.

K: Is that the truth or pretend?

The interview continues:

K: Is dad doing wee's on your hand true?

A: It's real, not pretend.

[A] then asks for his mother and doesn't want to talk any further.

The interview ends but the conversation continues:

K: When you came today did anyone tell you what to tell us?

A: Yes.

K: What?

A: Stop playing with toys.

K: What else?

A: Get lost.

A: They didn't do anything

K: Who?

A: [R], [S] and (undecipherable)

K: What did they say?

A: Don't play with toys.

This could be from a second interview, when she is asking about my husband, who the child knew as 'poppy'. The interview went as follows:

K: ... what happens at Grandma's?

That is me.

A: Poppy and me be naughty boys. We're in the naughty boys club.

K: What do you do in the naughty boys club?

A: Fight.

K: What else?

A: Play, play, play.

K: What do you play?

A: Don't know

K: Are they good games?

A: Yes

K: Like what?

A: Nintendo, Play rudeys

K: What is rudey's?

A: In the sheets Undecipherable.

She then asks the child to repeat the last sentence, which he does. Both CAWOs were not able to understand his answer. 'A' then stands up and attempts to leave the room. The caseworker tries to encourage him to sit back down. The interview continues:

K: Do you like playing with pop?

A: No poppy. He has a grey and a mo.

K: What is a grey and a mo?

A: Don't know

K: Does dad have a grey and a mo?

A: No

The caseworker further attempts to encourage the child to return to the room, but he refuses. The interview continues:

K: Do you like going to Dad's?

A: Yes, One more day, then the next day, then the next day then I don't have to go any more.

K: Who told you that?

The child then leaves the room. The lawyer that my daughter had employed at the time was trying to explain to him what the Family Court was about, and that is how he interpreted it. Playing in the sheets with poppy, my husband, was something that happened quite often because I looked after him while his mother was at work. We would get ready for kindy. He was showing very sexualised behaviours. He would strip off the minute he got to my house and get into bed, and want poppy to come in. On occasions he would try to manipulate my hand under his bottom so that I would be holding his penis.

He was taken to see Dr Winterton. Unfortunately we only have the last page of that report, where Dr Winterton says that he related that the sheets on his bed at home have clowns on them. He related that his mummy works at school and we pick mummy up from school with gran. He related that Friday is Mummy and A day. The doctor also said:

His general examination was unrewarding: cardiopulmonary system was normal: limbs were normal; abdomen was soft. He had a repaired hypospadias. This had been done by Mr Philip King when he was aged one. His anus was reviewed in the supine knee-chest position and was normal.

In summary, A is a three-year old child who did give me a disclosure today of inappropriate activities being performed against him by a family member. There were no physical findings to confirm or refute such an allegation. It is planned that I should write to a general practitioner and to Family and Children's Services.

The child had made disclosures to the GP. The GP contacted Family and Children's Services in 2000. As far as I know, he is still waiting for a reply. They had a meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the department's response to ongoing allegations of sexual abuse and physical abuse relating to the child. The department's report said:

Referrals and contact by the families to this department commenced in August 1999. These have been extensive and a file summary detailing the contacts is attached.

The history relating to the families is that [D] and [M] married after meeting through their related professions. Twins were later conceived via the IVF program, however, one child died soon after birth. From information to hand, it would seem that Mrs McGee, [D]'s mother, has an enmeshed relationship with her daughter and it is understood that, after the birth of the twins, Mrs McGee took 'control' of [the child] and subsequently her daughter. [D]'s parents had divorced and Mrs McGee remarried at around the time [D] and [M] separated.

CHAIR—Do you want to just make your point to us, please? We do not want to go through the courts. This is about children in institutions; it is not about a dispute that may or may not have been resolved one way or the other, okay?

Ms McGee—My point is that the way they conducted the interviews and the things they have said led to the child being removed from my daughter's care. This has consequently caused us both to lose our houses and the breakdown of my marriage. On the first day of court the caseworker walked past us and gave the father a hug. I have witnesses to that. They also claim that we have mental conditions, mental health issues.

CHAIR—This is DFS or whatever it is called over here, is it?

Ms McGee—FCS.

Ms Pritchett—Family and Children's Services is one of the department's names.

Ms McGee—I cannot keep up with the name changes.

Ms Pritchett—The situation is that the child has disclosed abuse. He has disclosed it frequently. The abuse that he is disclosing is to the father, and he remains in the father's care. When Janet comes to talk to you, she will tell you of a case, which is exactly the same, where there is a known abuser and the children remain in his care. I was going to ask a young man called Leo to speak. It seems that he has left. He may have had an appointment—I do not know. The reason for calling Leo was to validate the degree of cover-up that goes on when cases are disclosed of child abuse, especially when they involve high-profile people. His abuse involves very high-profile people.

CHAIR—How does that relate to our inquiry into children in institutions?

Ms Pritchett—Police presumably are part and parcel of the institutions as far as—

CHAIR—I think that is drawing a long bow.

Ms Pritchett—The police is an institution.

CHAIR—No. I am not having a—

Ms Pritchett—Fine.

CHAIR—You are talking about children who have been put in institutions because of situations at home.

Ms Pritchett—I guess my focus here was the cover-up that goes on when those children try to get arrests made of people who have abused them.

CHAIR—I understand that, but that is where you have been in Bridgewater or somewhere like that. We are not talking about family situations. That is not what this inquiry is about.

Ms Pritchett—Yes, right.

CHAIR—It is about children who may have been in Bridgewater or Clontarf or Bidura or anywhere else.

Ms Pritchett—I guess my focus was the police and how they handle it.

CHAIR—I understand what your focus is. Who have you got next? We need to move on.

Ms Pritchett—I will finish and thank you very much for your attention. I know it has been a long afternoon, but we are representing several people and it is a bit hard.

Ms McGee—Hopefully one day there will be an inquiry into the Family Court. I heard a Liberal senator Beattie-bashing because Beattie had known that there was a disabled boy in foster care and he was caged and it was not reported.

Ms Pritchett—I would like to take the opportunity to thank my committee—some of them are here. They are lovely people that give their time and energy, and without them we could not have formed the group and we would not be giving support. I would also like to add that I do not run an agency; I do not have my name in the *Yellow Pages*. I am a mum, and I just do what I do from home to the best of my ability, and yet these people keep crossing my path. I think it is a huge problem.

CHAIR—I am sure it is. Thank you very much, Ms Pritchett.

Ms Pritchett—Thank you very much for your attention.

[5.22 p.m.]

LOWE, Mrs Janet Elizabeth, (Private capacity)

RYAN, Mrs Pat, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mrs Lowe—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee. Mrs Lowe, you heard what I just said to Ms Pritchett. This inquiry is not about family law disputes; it is about children in institutions.

Mrs Lowe—I understand that, and I realise that considering the time I should get through this as quickly as possible.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Lowe—I am a patient advocate and parent advocate. I am not consumed with ‘getting’ the department. I have a lot of interests. I am on the board of the Health Consumers’ Council and I am a member of the King Edward community advisory council. Why am I here today? I have never had dealings with the Department for Community Services, the Department of Community Welfare, Family and Children’s Services, the Department of Community Development or whatever welfare is currently calling itself. It probably makes more sense to ask: how did I get here today?

Ten years ago I started a support group for another unmentionable group of victims: those persons sexually abused by doctors. Amongst the dozens of alleged abusing doctors that came to my notice were 11 alleged paedophile doctors. One of these abusers, who was found guilty by the criminal courts, sat on a sexual abuse task force alongside the so-called departmental child protection experts, who, despite all their expertise, failed to recognise him as such. I make a point of saying this because on more than one occasion I have been told by departmental workers that they are trained to recognise paedophiles. I suggest that we all should apply to undertake that particular training.

I was well aware of paedophiles in general, though I had not connected doctors into the loop. It was a light bulb turning on in my head. My fertile mind told me that some abused children must be so badly hurt that they would need surgery, so of course in some cases doctors would

clandestinely be involved. And, if they also kept quiet, they must be of a similar predilection. I began networking with groups that supported the victims of child abuse and found that many children had been abused in care, some over a period of years. When I asked how it could have gone on so long without the department knowing, it became apparent that the department obviously did know.

I began to get cases referred to me with a medical component. Decisions had been made with complete disregard to medical conditions by persons unqualified to do so. I began to get cases referred that had stagnated and not moved forward to enable reunification with parents. I also began to get cases that were so bereft of natural justice it made me wonder what sort of country I lived in. One of the worst practices the department uses is the threat to apprehend children through the court if parents do not consent to placing their children in foster care. In one particular judgment in the children's court here in an apprehension case, of which I have a copy, Magistrate Vose makes a point of saying:

I regard this practice as inappropriate because it is forcing parents to agree to de facto wardship of their children as opposed to legal wardship. They then have none of the protections that exist under the Child Welfare Act of 1947.

And that goes on constantly. Another practice is the acceptance by departmental workers that whatever is written in a case file is the absolute truth. In the same judgment, Magistrate Vose berates a case manager, saying:

It becomes clear that his recollection of events described by him in his statement was extremely poor or nonexistent and that he compiled his statement from notes in departmental files upon which he had placed a blind faith as to their accuracy. Not only is this evidence most unsatisfactory, his attitude indicated that he felt some resentment at being closely cross-examined about its deficiencies. I found this particularly poor from a FACS social worker.

And that—sorry, I am getting a bit upset—was in the case of Melissa, who is here and will stand up and identify herself. In Melissa's case—Melissa will not mind me saying this, because I have talked to her about it—she has a slight intellectual disability. In the file that I submitted, it is mentioned that, knowing her limits, she has one child with problems and she did not want to have another child. She knew she could not manage two children. So she put herself in to get a sterilisation, which unfortunately failed. She did end up with a second child, and she could not cope. Within a week of the birth of the child, she reported this to whoever she needed to report it to in order to get help. When the apprehension happened, for whatever the reasons—and I will not go into the reasons—what concerned me in this case were things that went to and from the lawyers, like:

I confirm my previous instructions that the department does not consider it possible for Ms Scanlon to resume the primary responsibility for the full-time care of the children on an ongoing basis.

This young woman was going to be given no chance of ever getting her children back. The judgment goes on:

I am instructed that the department does not consider that the respondent mother is capable of caring for the children independently in view of her own intellectual disability, evidenced by the fact of her registration with the Disability Services Commission.

The judgments that these people make all the time must be against the Equal Opportunity Act, if nothing else. I would like to say that after three years of being involved with Melissa, she has got her children back. Whether that is actually going to work out, we do not know, because there is always a fracturing when children are taken away. Melissa is scared about doing the right thing or doing the wrong thing, and it sets up a tension all the time.

Throughout any apprehension procedure, the department implements many devices to wear down the resolve of the family. One way is to not advise them of their rights. For example, nothing is mentioned of other members of the family applying to be relative carers. In cases where we have imparted this knowledge to the parents, the department has gone as far as denying that there is such a thing as a relative carer. This comes back to being told the truth about things all the time. The department will often take a premature stand as to the veracity of one parent or both parents. In such a case it is well nigh impossible to change the course of events despite information that enables the charting of that course to be proved wrong.

In one such case, a young girl who was a pawn in the machinations of adults escaped from the department's own high security facility and returned to her alleged abusing father. The department then placed her temporarily with an aunt. The child insisted on returning to her father and was allowed to do so despite an horrific statement of particulars entered in the court. This case is that of Mr Bridgeman.

The department would not give practical assistance to the father because the return had not been the department's choice. That is unbelievable spitefulness. The police are looking into charging the mother in this case with making a false statement, which is why it was all generated in the first place. John had got information that, adequately looked at, would have brought that out earlier in the case, and it would never have developed as far as it did. This means nothing to the department, as the alleged abuse was deemed to be substantiated by them. The father had his reputation ruined and spent a fortune on legal representation.

A new form of torment available to the department is the new transportation act. It is new on the statute books but old in application, as you have already heard from Mr Box. The father could not be here because at the moment he is in prison, but he asked me to come along and say this. The young mother in her attempts to secure monetary and practical assistance exaggerated her situation in such a believable way that the father was marginalised out of the equation. The mother was assisted to move interstate with a case plan of telecontact with the father. She neither saw a social worker as per the case plan—this little child was a ward of the state—nor allowed the telecontact. The father had been the main carer of the child for most of her life, and this could be proved by the parenting allowance paid direct to him. He had this information but the department did not want to look at it. They took the part of the mother in this case. With the wardship now expired, the child is in another state, with the father having no idea of her address.

The departmental worker in some cases is ordered to follow a direction from higher up in the command line. A senior caseworker resigned in such a situation, with her opposing report never seeing the light of day and a young mother stripped of her three children, the youngest being only 18 months at the time. And that is Jackie, who is in the audience. There is a case practice manual that any parent caught up with the department can read. It is in the state library. Unfortunately, though, there is no consistency in decision making and application of the case practice manual. In fact, I have now been told that they do not have to follow the case practice

manual. How can any parent check to see what the correct procedure is, let alone if it is being followed, if there are movable goalposts, if there is movable information, all the time. People need to know what their rights are and what the rights of the state are and be able to check, without going to lawyers, exactly what is happening and what they can do about things. Maybe they can then come to terms if they cannot do anything about it. It has not all been doom and gloom. I have assisted in reuniting some children with their parents. As I said, it took three years to get the D children back.

I want to talk briefly about Edward Caine. He was discarded by the department in 1993, and that brings us to the juvenile justice report of what happens to a lot of children who are taken into care. I think you may have got some of this information from Mary's submission. Of children in care, 18 per cent were second generation in care, 44 per cent were at risk educationally, 33 per cent were prone to drug and substance abuse, 20 per cent had mental health problems and 29 per cent had come into contact with the criminal justice system. In relation to wards placed, a number of common characteristics were found amongst the young people identified as at risk of offending. The placement of wards occurred at a very young age: 50 per cent were under five years. If these experts have had these children from such a young age, why haven't they turned out better?

In relation to higher education, 95 per cent had poor achievement and attendance at school, with 50 per cent receiving multiple suspensions and 75 per cent using drugs and other substances. In relation to instability and placements, 75 per cent had more than four placements within a two-year time frame. If they are going to take children away—and I accept that some children should be taken away—it has to be to a safer place. Mr Caine went into care when he was about six. He was taken from an extremely abusive father who somehow managed to get political pull to have the children taken back again.

I was in criminal court this morning because Mr Caine is on charges of threatening to kill his father. He is only threatening to kill his father in order that his father will hit him or do something so that he can get him into court and have it exposed what this man has done to him over the years. But Edward does not understand that there are different ways of going about things. One thing I have managed to do is get him to sign a letter to the coroner's department, because they will now reopen the case of the death of his mother. Edward tells us that he witnessed the death of his mother from a blow from Albert Caine, the father. I am trying to get him to realise that, if you go down the right tracks with the authorities, maybe things will happen.

Another person I would like to mention—and I have written about him in my submission—is Marcus. Marcus went into care at 4½. He had the most terrible life in care that you can imagine. It is in the report. Marcus' father was in prison. One of the abusers of Marcus ended up in prison—not for abusing him; for abusing other children. He had not been found guilty of abusing Marcus. Marcus' father, in prison, came face-to-face with his abuser and killed him.

Marcus, feeling such guilt because his father was in trouble, shot himself up with heroin. I think he was 13 or 14 at the time. He stole a car and he was off to kill himself. He should have killed himself—people do not understand how he did not kill himself. He was lying in hospital unconscious and they thought he was going to die. Then they thought that, if he stayed alive, he would be a vegetable. But the vegetable started to move arms and legs and things. Finally,

Marcus can walk about, but he is not a complete person. Marcus was a 4½ year old child who went into care. How could he turn out like this?

I just want you to understand. Some children went through care and came out well at the end of it, but there is a big element of children that go through and they do not turn out well. There is abuse occurring in the system. There may be individual abusers or a few organised abusers. But there is also abuse occurring by the system, by letting these people still be in there. As we have heard from other people in Bridgewater et cetera, it was known about. Also, there is the abuse of the families when the department comes into contact with them, as they are going through the legal system and trying to sort things out and coming to terms with things. There are just no standards that are followed all the time. There can be identical cases but they are handled differently—it all depends on who is the case worker in there. There is just one person who I would like to have permission to speak. She will only speak for a few minutes. She has written something down. She is a grandmother who is hurting very much.

Mrs Ryan—I would like to speak to you today, but I am not used to speaking out in front of people. I am not used to writing letters or speeches. In fact, one of the things that the DCD used against me was a letter I wrote to one of their counsellors 12 months before, when my son got custody of his daughter. I wrote as I speak, and I used the word ‘she’ instead of ‘her mother’ and this made all the difference to the letter. Anyway, I will try my best.

It starts with lies—that is what we call the department or the DCD. On December 2001 our family went to trial. Before the trial started, the department said to my son, ‘If you admit to doing this and do a course in sexual abuse, we will have you back with your children in six months.’ My son said, ‘No, I will not admit to something I have not done, as the person who did do this will not be punished.’

The two-week trial started on 4 December 2001. On the Monday morning of the second week of the trial the department again came to my son with their offer. He said no. Then, with his lawyer, he made up his own agreement, which was presented to the department. The agreement consisted of a parenting course, a drug and alcohol course, a meeting with the department’s psychologist and then supervised visits with his daughter—eventually with me as the supervisor—and also unsupervised visits for my husband and I on our two-weekly visits. The department was shown the agreement and agreed to it.

Nothing was signed before going back into court. Somehow, before the paperwork reached the magistrate, the paperwork was either switched or they overrode the agreement and presented their paperwork. One person in the department, who was the head of the DoCS team then, has said to me, ‘We are above the law. We can do what we like.’ That was said to me on numerous occasions. Some months later, after nothing was happening in line with our agreement, we found that we were bound to their original agreement and \$7,000 out of pocket. We did not know what to do about it. My son should have gone on with the trial. He would have gone on with it if he had known that the department could gain consent by fraud or fraudulently present their own paperwork to the magistrate.

That was two years ago and we have not gained any ground since. My son has not seen his daughter since 10 September 2000, the start of it all. There is no likelihood of this happening. The department’s psychologist—another liar—has a large file on my son even though he has

never seen him or spoken to him. He has decided that my son did this and that my son's daughter does not want to see him. Four months before 10 September, my granddaughter told me and a few other people—including the department's star witness, who admitted in court that she had heard my granddaughter—'Mummy put a stick there, and it hurt.' This child was only three years old; I do not think she could have made that up—not at that age.

My son booked his daughter into a childhood adolescence clinic but before she could attend the department stepped in, stating that we had not done anything to help her—another lie. Since then, our lives have been hell and our health has suffered greatly. We keep trying. Every time I tell the department what my granddaughter says, they indicate that I am in denial and will not look into it. How do we get the case opened to find out what went wrong. As a grandmother, I am pleading with you to help us—and anyone else who has had this done to them—to call a royal commission into the department, to stop their lies and to take away some of their power. Innocent people are getting hurt and innocent children, as in my granddaughter's case, are still at risk. The department also changes the rules and makes up new rules when it suits them—sometimes without even discussing it with you. Last week I received paperwork from a case review conference, which I could not attend, stating that I have to attend a parenting course at Mofflyn, a drug and alcohol course and a sexual abuse course. I do not know why. I do not drink. I do not use drugs, only the ones the doctors give me to help me get through this. I think this is my punishment for standing up to them, as they do not like their authority questioned, and because I refuse to believe my son did this.

If any of you are grandparents, please look at your grandchildren this Christmas and consider how you would feel if you were tricked, lied to, had your grandchildren taken away and had no way of getting them back. If I have to believe anyone over the past three years, I will believe my granddaughter because I know what I heard from her. That was, 'Mummy put a stick there and it hurt, Bummah.' That is what she calls me. Please give us a royal commission.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Ryan. Is that your submission completed, Mrs Lowe?

Mrs Lowe—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[5.46 p.m.]

DAY, Ms Frances, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Day—Yes.

CHAIR—You are appearing today in a private capacity and your comments will be on the public record. You should be cautious in what you say to ensure that you do not identify individuals and do not refer to cases before the courts. Aside from that, you should feel free to speak without any fear of reprisal or intimidation. The committee has before it your submission. I invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms Day—I have given a submission so I will not reiterate that, although that was suggested. We have listened to a lot today and I have made notes about some of the things that I think are important to mention. I am a counsellor who specialises in providing support and information to people recovering from trauma and post-traumatic stress. That takes the form of individual counselling and debriefings, and running community based support groups. That is how I came to be involved here today. I had the privilege of supporting a couple of ladies who had been through institutions and one very brave lady mentioned some things. Somehow, Marilyn asked me to put in a submission.

A few key points about post-traumatic stress are alienation and loss of trust, leading to an inability to let anybody get really close, preventing traumatised people having the support that they need even more than people who do not have complex post-traumatic stress difficulties to overcome. This is the legacy of traumatic stress, and it causes ongoing distress. As we have heard, it also creates a lifestyle which creates more trauma.

We have heard people speak about being vulnerable and therefore becoming, once again, victims in the systems. There is a whole dynamic that happens, where a person tries to recreate a familiar environment in an effort to master the ‘overpowerment’ they have experienced in the first place. We have seen people stuck in that painful time period where they still see the world and interact through the eyes of the traumatised person at the time of the trauma. All of this results in problems in obtaining help from government and other systems because of such a negative experience with the system, and being in an institutional style environment when they were children.

A recommendation is that people have a free choice of support service. Another thing that was highlighted today was not to be labelled, pigeonholed. People really need to have money allocated to what they choose, what they find helpful and what they can relate to. CLAN is great and will help a lot of people. CLAN needs a lot of money to have an administrator. We do not have an administrator here. The only reason CLAN exists here at all in name is because some

volunteers have stuck their hands up. But if they fall over sick tomorrow there will not be any CLAN representative here in WA.

Large systems have failed just about all of these people who we have listened to today. So we do rely on the community to provide the support. They are going to be people who each of these people perceive to be safe. There was a question about people who had had army experiences versus those who had experienced institutionalisation as a child, and I have a couple of thoughts on that if you would like me to give them to you. In the army, people are supported and encouraged to keep in touch. There are systems in place and there is support for people to keep in touch. People in the army are adults, so it is an adult experience. People are taught to rely on each other because they need to survive. There are some associated feelings of pride and bravery, which was a bit slow coming for the Vietnam vets but, eventually, today there is some.

A child in an institution has experienced, as we have heard a lot of today, systematic separation, as opposed to the encouragement of bonding. They were children in that experience, and children are helpless and disempowered. So the prospect of trying to reconnect over and above the systematic separation is a task that is almost too hard. It is experienced as too hard to find each other. Even then, the associated feelings that seem to be mainly prevailing are those of shame, rather than pride. They are probably things that are worth noting. I have found in the groups that, even though people did not have exactly the same experience, people who meet others experiencing similar pain and perplexing emotions and symptoms—like numbing, disassociation, flashbacks, nightmares—have lessened alienation. The groups focus on building trust and beginning to form bonds.

The groups have broadened the childhood institutionalisation survivors' bonds to other people who have experienced similar challenges. So there is bonding now with people who have experienced child abuse in their own families—and we have heard about some of that today—as well as other traumatic episodes; with people who have experienced some sort of being on the fringe of mainstream society and its norms. As each person develops more self-awareness, experiences, understanding, support and recognition they then can transfer this newly developed trust to people outside the group who they feel they might be able to trust and who can listen, acknowledge and accept reality. Thus the community where we feel we belong grows and people can then start to venture into proper relationships with more people.

What I have heard from the few people that I have met and from most victims of abuse is that there is the need for an apology from the perpetrator or from their representative where the perpetrator may have died. The second most important need seems to be some sort of assistance to repair the damage. This is most commonly provided in the form of financial support. As we have seen today, and I have seen with the people I have met, most people have multiple layers of trauma to resolve. It is only a lot later in their lives when they actually become aware of opportunities or even become aware that what they experienced is something that they need not have experienced or they need not continue to experience. As we can well imagine, this is a time-consuming and, thus, costly process. Whose responsibility is it to bear the cost of this rehabilitation so that the person can live the remainder of their life fully and productively?

I believe that education and support of rehabilitation is a primary strategy, in whatever initiative happens, in lessening the strain on public health and judicial systems, because healthy, aware and supported people do not need to depend on others to provide what they could

maintain for themselves. They need informed counsellors who can empower them to become wise, self-managing, valuable community members who usually contribute far more back to society than those who have not experienced difficulties. However, the investment in counselling and other support is needed before these benefits can be received.

We need support, including financial support, for structures such as CLAN and other types of support groups, publications and distribution of self-help material. Books such as those written by institutional abuse survivors—for example, there is a book called *Daughters of Nazareth*; I do not know the author's name—and other self-help books about recovering from trauma do a lot to help people who have not met lots of other people yet. The few films that have been made have done a lot to validate the survivors' experiences and provide a medium of communicating to non-institutionalised persons what their experiences were really like. We have a flyer for *The Magdalene Sisters*, a particularly good movie that gave us all an insight into what happened in those types of institutions.

It is hoped that some of these resources will be purchased for survivors so they have easy access to a wide choice to facilitate their recovery and the building of some quality of life. The most appropriate payments for these resources would be from the organisations representing those that perpetrated the abuse. Very close behind these in responsibility are the government bodies that are responsible for the health and welfare of the community, especially defenceless children. At the very least, there should be closer monitoring of services provision and, more importantly, a facility for objective complaint resolution.

So far, the adequacy of existing remedies and support mechanisms has been limited to survivors needing to self-fund their rehabilitation from actions that were the responsibility of community systems. Often, survivors have only been able to access basic low-cost support, and too many have been simply medicated, sedated or again institutionalised. With the increasing community awareness of trauma, we have seen many cases of recovering survivors gaining enough knowledge to begin a process and appropriate support such that they are now invaluable support givers in the community. All that work needs to be appropriately funded.

Funding should be allocated to a wide range of resources and not limited to particular professional qualifications so that recovering survivors have access to a range of healing modalities of their choice. We heard that highlighted today; I wrote this statement prior to today. Every individual needs their recovery plan to follow their personal requirements. They must not be expected to somehow make themselves fit one model designed to fit all. Choice is the privilege of empowered people with resources. This is the opposite to helplessness, which is the core of post-traumatic stress and the situation of so many people we have heard from today. This is the very least that can be given to survivors of our society's institutionalisation atrocities in their efforts to reverse the chain of events that led to helplessness and thus work toward recovery.

We look forward to great outcomes from educational and restorative initiatives addressing a wide range of needs so as to maximise health and welfare, particularly of those people the community neglected to protect in childhood. The institutions that created situations where abuse was able to proliferate need to facilitate reconciliation by formal apologies—a letter, at least, is preferred—and funding for the healing process of the victims who can be identified.

I would like very much to thank you for your time and the opportunity for people to express their opinions, experiences and recommendations to government. When I first wrote my submission in July, I really did not believe anything would happen. As I wrote that to Geraldine, I realised that was an expression of a community feeling of disempowerment—and we have certainly heard a lot of that today.

We sincerely hope that your action will continue until a wide range of support is funded by government to prevent further ripple effects of past trauma transferring to people's children and others associated with traumatised people. Funding is needed to educate our whole community to better respond to traumatised people, because the numbers are huge. Healing comes from understanding our processes of recovery and being empowered to seek and obtain relevant support from where we feel we can get it. The article about this inquiry was on page 48 of Wednesday's *West Australian*. Correct me if there was any other publicity closer to the headlines; I do not read the newspaper very often. This is indicative of society's approach to such deep trauma and the mistakes made for our people. A higher profile and education—not media sensationalisation—can empower wider vigilance and action throughout the community, because government staff will always be limited in numbers, resources et cetera.

Complaints need to be responded to and acted upon promptly. I think it should be a priority in government funding to continue to improve the supervision and monitoring of services by independent panels of non-government people, who are annually re-elected at well-publicised public meetings, to facilitate the participation of concerned and educated members of the community.

Finally, I congratulate the people here, who have come with great courage, and at emotional cost, to share with you today. In order for some healing rather than for this to become yet another re-traumatisation, feedback about what happens next is needed. At least, for further dissemination, emails could be forwarded to those on the email list and those who add themselves to the email list. People really need to see evidence of action. So many have sought help and have been let down, so it is imperative that some action come out of this and that it be kept public and transparent.

Senator McLUCAS—You talked about the need for informed counsellors. Today we have heard evidence from a number of people that have not had very successful interactions with your profession, to be frank.

Ms Day—I am not a psychologist!

Senator McLUCAS—Can you give us any guidance about how we assist people coming into contact with counselling services or individuals who have training—not necessarily training; but maybe that is the answer—in being able to provide the appropriate support to care leavers? When we were in Adelaide it was very clear that some counsellors are very good at connecting well with people who are care leavers. Is there any advice you would like to give us about what we as governments should be doing to facilitate better outcomes through the counselling process?

Ms Day—You can always get accurate information by doing surveys amongst people who use counsellors and by listening to people who are trying to find a counsellor and people who have

successfully found a counsellor. I have a person who has been through post traumatic stress. Just about everyone who says that they have tried to speak to somebody says that you need to talk to somebody who really understands. That is why I started the support groups and that is why I mention the groups quite often. In that case, it is not totally up to the person running the group—the counsellor. A lot of healing comes from the other people in the group. I always suggest to people looking for a counsellor that they ask, ‘Do you know anything about traumatic stress?’ and listen to the answer; you will know whether that person can relate to your not.

The other thing is that counselling is a personal relationship. Not everybody is going to get on with each other. I always suggest that if you really feel it is not working with this person you have a right to go to another person, just like we move from one dentist to another or from one sales rep to another. Let us take it further away from personal care. That is always my advice to people when they are looking for a counsellor. It is about a relationship, but you should also ask them if they know. You will be the best judge of whether that is the best person for you.

In terms of what you can offer people, you can interview people and make a big list and keep adding to that list of people and give out whole lists of who is in their area. Of course, if CLAN gets up and running they would have a list and people would talk. People would say, ‘Go and see that person. I found them really helpful.’ If it gels with another person they will think, ‘That sounds like the right person for me.’ There should be a lot of freedom of information. A little bit of funding for these types of organisations to disseminate information is not going to cost anywhere near some of the other costs. What CLAN could do with the cost of one night’s accommodation in the psychiatric ward at a hospital would be amazing. I am just saying CLAN because of the focus of this, but there are a lot of other associations and groups that have grown from people who have been traumatised in all sorts of ways. The groups often die off because people cannot get the funding, and yet they are the most powerful body. They probably would become those really good watchdog representatives on panels like I have suggested.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you very much.

Senator MURRAY—I was essentially in the same group of people—parliamentarians and bureaucrats, never mind Australians generally. I was not aware that there were probably several hundred thousand children in institutions and in care last century. What characterises that very large group is how badly networked it is. I do not think government can reach those people through standard forms of advertising or whatever. This inquiry has advertised as heavily as the Senate can afford and yet it has reached very few people. They do not read newspapers; they are not networked. There is no mechanism so it is difficult to get a response.

My instinct is that you are right. You have to find the means to fund the network, which probably needs to be community based. But going on from that, there is still the difficulty of lots of those people not wanting to engage. Being institutionalised or harmed as a child makes people reluctant to connect with community or self-help groups. How do we overcome that? We can see part of the solution, but the nature of the problem is such that you cannot—

Ms Day—Encouraging publication of books like the ones that we heard about: *Rockspider* and *Daughters of Nazareth*.

Senator MURRAY—But a lot of those people do not read. A lot of those people do not go to movies.

Ms Day—There are videos. We could do some stuff on videos. I am just thinking on my feet at the moment with that question. What works really well is talkback stuff on radio if you can find people who will speak—and we have heard a whole lot of people speak today. There are a lot of people who will not speak, but there are a lot of people who will. It would be good if those people could get some support. A little point is that the administrative bureaucracy and red tape that is involved with running a group that is incorporated in any way and that could be up for public liability—forget the insurance thing—is horrendous. Red tape and bureaucracy is one of the most stressful things to deal with for a person who is traumatised. That is why I say all these groups need to have a paid administrator or somebody who does not have and has not had traumatic stress, who can do the work of running the group. The people themselves can do the relating to each other and that is it, speaking when they choose to.

Senator MURRAY—I smiled, because I can imagine someone who has not had traumatic stress who has to run administration and so on is going to get traumatic stress.

Ms Day—I knew you were going to say that. I do not know about that; I think there is often a really lovely feeling of camaraderie in groups, so we will take that as good black humour. But I think running any organisation can be very, very stressful and I do not think traumatised people are going to be any worse or better. There is a lot of camaraderie, actually; I think it would be a very rewarding job for a lot of people.

Senator HUMPHRIES—When you listed the things you said victims needed, the first thing you said was an apology from perpetrators or their representatives. What value do you think would be attached by victims in general to an apology from government—a blanket apology for the things that happened in their own institutions or in institutions they were responsible for administering?

Ms Day—Excuse me for a second. Sorry, I thought I might have a much more informed answer. The answer is that I do not know.

CHAIR—It may be something you might want to consider and write back to us on.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Maybe you could canvass the views of the people you deal with.

Ms Day—I could collect some information on that one.

CHAIR—Would that be convenient for you?

Ms Day—It is a matter of remembering. If I do not write it down or someone does not email me—

CHAIR—Hansard will have it all done up—they will sit back tonight, work through their meal break and all the rest of it!

Ms Day—So would a blanket apology from government be sufficient?

Senator HUMPHRIES—I was not saying that. It is more: how would it be received? Would it be cathartic? Would it be a step in the right direction? I am sure it would not satisfy everybody—or most people—completely, but it would perhaps be a step in the right direction. I would be interested in your clients' reaction to that suggestion.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Day. I would like to thank you all for coming along to this public session. We are now going to go in camera. We will recommence tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock, with the Department of Community Development up first.

Evidence was then taken in camera—

Committee adjourned at 7.24 p.m.