

Redress report : John Wells

**REDRES WA APPLICATION
SUPPORTING INFORMATION**
CBERS Redress Unique Identifier: 4328 — John Wells

Background on CBERS Redress Service and the Report Writer

CBERS Redress Service is one of the preferred tenderers assisting clients to complete the Redress WA application made by clients to the Department for Communities. CBERS Redress Service is jointly managed by Dr Philippa White and Gail Green. Both are Social Workers experienced in out of home care, care leavers and long and short term effects of childhood trauma. They employ sub contact professionals from professions such as social work, psychology and counselling to assist with interviews and preparation of reports.

This report was completed by Dennis Tierney. He has both a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and a Masters in Social Work. He has had extensive work experience working in the welfare field with children who were abused and Wards of the State in South Australia. For the last twenty three years he has worked predominantly in the area of Adult Mental Health and has worked with victims of child abuse now suffering mental health conditions. He has also worked in the area of Drug and Alcohol Counselling/Rehabilitation.

Identifying Information on Client

John Wells is of white Anglo Saxon background, the son of Myra Wells and Arthur Wells. He has a twin brother Arthur Wells. Both boys were given to State care because the parents were struggling financially and they believed that they would be better provided for in state care. They were about age six at the time and spent the next 8 years or so in institutional care – Coolgardie Convent; Castledaire Boys Home; Clontarf Boys Home and later at Hillstone Detention Centre.

John found a sense of freedom when he left institutional care however did not know how to manage this responsibly and recalls getting into trouble with the law at an early age and getting a taste for alcohol, becoming dependent on it at age 14. He recalls his first drink, thinking to himself "*this is good stuff*" for the reason that it gave him an altered sense of self by lowering his natural inhibitions and giving him a false sense of confidence.

John married as a young man but felt inadequate in the relationship and avoided the relationship and it's responsibilities to a large extent by taking jobs in the far north of the State and drinking excessively. He was married for 18 years but this came unstuck due to his inability to express his emotions and the alcoholism and violence which accompanied that. He regretfully recalled an incident when he was "*rotten drunk*" and bashed his wife and son before passing out.

John said that alcohol gave him a (temporary) feeling of well being, suggesting that for the times when he was not drunk he felt miserable in himself.

John eventually had to come to terms with his alcoholism because it was destroying his health and life in general. He joined AA and through this program was able to get on top of his addiction and has not had a drink for over 20 years. It was through AA that for the first time in his life he got a sense of belonging. He now visits prisons on a regular basis to assist prisoners who have been alcohol dependent.

Despite the progress that he has made in getting his life in order, John said that he is still not a happy man and that sometimes he can get a sense of peace when he sits in church. AA helped him to re establish a relationship with God, though it is somewhat different to how he experienced it growing up where religion was drummed into him and God was portrayed as a God of vengeance and retribution.

John has one adult son,

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Reasons Client Requested Assistance from CRS

It was suggested to John by a friend that he could benefit through the Redress scheme as he has never really spoken to anybody about his institutional past, and that it may assist in bringing some reconciliation.

Number of Meetings with Client

The information in this report was collected over one extended interview with John on 29th March 2009 and a brief meeting on 7th May 2009

Assessments Conducted

General Psychosocial assessment; DASS 21 which is a set of three self-report scales designed to measure the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress. and a PTSD Check List (PCL) which is a 17-item self-report instrument designed as a screening tool to assess symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. His scores for both these tests were high (well above average), suggesting he suffers still the effects of trauma he experienced growing up in institutional care and that he has high levels of anxiety and depression which significantly impacts on his quality of life. See attachments to this report for detailed analysis.

John presented as an intelligent man who was articulate and insightful with a calm exterior which belied an inner turmoil related to unresolved anger and resentment and hurts from the past.

He is a man who lives a solitary life and has diabetes which restricts his activity levels.

Information Gathered

(Q14) Actual abuse experienced

Coolgardie Convent

John's first recollection of abuse was in the Coolgardie convent at age 6 where physical punishment was administered on a regular basis for minor incidents. He also recalled a time when he was going to have a bath and a towel slipped off him and he was called a "dirty little heathen" by one of the carers. He said he received many bashings and belts across the head.

John said of this time *"if I laughed I got hit, if I cried I got hit, so I repressed my emotions and developed a fear to do anything."* He described the experience as a crushing of his spirit. He said he developed feelings of inadequacy and low self esteem through the constant putdowns and verbal abuse.

Castledaire Boys Home

John's father took him away from Coolgardie when he was age 8 and was taken to Castledaire Boys Home where he remained for approximately 2 years. His recollection there was being *"full of fear the whole time, forever lining up and forever hungry...there was never enough to eat."* He said that he was often so hungry he would even eat rotten apples which were to be fed to the pigs.

John remembers getting sexually fondled by a Brother who put his hand up his shorts whilst resting him on his knee. This particular brother used to single kids out.

There was a pecking order amongst the boys and they used to ridicule each other. John was down the pecking order line and frequently got bashings from the bigger kids.

At Castledaire, John and the other boys used to spend time after school and weekends scrubbing floors, cleaning and working in the garden. He recalled that he was required to work in the garden without shoes and that he had insufficient clothing and was often cold. The clothing that he did have was ex army clothing and several sizes too big, such that they had to be held up with ropes.

At one time John ran away from Castledaire, finding his way to East Perth where his parents were living. He reported that he was bashed by his father and sent back to Castledaire where he got another bashing by a brother for having run away.

Clontarf Boys Home

At about 9 or 10 John was moved to Clontarf Boys Home. He recalled *"we had to line up every morning to a beat of a drum."* There would be a socks inspection before marching into the classroom. If a boy had uneven or twisted socks he was beaten.

He was often cold and hungry. For breakfast he would have wheat bix and hot water and dry bread. He said that there were standover kids who used to take food from him and the other more vulnerable.

He recalled how Brother Doyle was cruel in forcing kids who had artificial legs to play football. He recalled also a brother Moylan who once gave him an upper cut punch when he was in the bathroom, and this cut his tongue.

There was an occasion when a brother exposed (full erection) himself to John shocking him and not knowing how to react. He was aware that other kids were singled out to have sex with certain brothers.

John developed an unhealthy view of sex as a result of what he witnessed at Clontarf and the seeming double standards practiced by some brothers and what they preached.

John had rotten teeth as a kid but was never given dental treatment, consequently he had regular toothache. This added to his feelings of being self conscious and worthless-that his dental care was not considered important if in fact it was even noticed.

John left Clontarf when he was about 14 or 15 and went to live with his mother. He attended St Francis Christian Brothers College for a short time as he could not handle his newfound freedom and got involved in petty crime which resulted in him being sent to Stoneville boys' home for six months.

Stoneville

He said that the regime of abuse and discipline was similar to what he experienced at Castledaire and Clontarf and that on at least one occasion was punished by being locked in a tin shed overnight outside the main building which was a frightful experience.

(Q15) Impact of the abuse

The exposure to regular beatings, ridicule, intimidation and neglect impacted severely on John's personal psychological and emotional development. He developed a personality which was fearful and not trusting of others – particularly those who had authority status.

It severely affected his self esteem and he grew up and continued to believe as a man, that he was inferior to others. This made it difficult for him to establish close friendships and he lacked personal confidence.

The lack of warmth in his formative years left him feeling a void in his stomach and he said that he was never able to laugh or react spontaneously.

John's feelings of emptiness and lack of personal confidence led him to becoming an alcoholic as he had not developed an ability to cope with personal challenges in a mature way and he had no responsible and caring role models to guide him. Such was his level of mistrust of others that he never felt inclined to seek out professional help.

John's low self esteem also was a stumbling block in developing a successful marriage relationship.

His understanding of sexuality was confused due to the attitudes instilled in him by the brothers that sex was dirty. Consequently, even in marriage he felt some repulsion in normal sexual relations with his wife. This further led him to becoming confused at one stage about his own sexual identity. This was exacerbated by an incident when he was 16 when he had a male sexual encounter in a public toilet and had mixed feelings of pleasure and repulsion – similar to what he had experienced with a Brother when he was in care.

John's poor education and the fear instilled in him by the brothers made it difficult for him to learn. This resulted in him having limited opportunities in his working life and achieving his true potential.

The psychological tests that John did as part of the interview, indicates that he still suffers trauma, anxiety and depression to a significant degree. This drastically affects his quality of life and social functioning. He also requires daily anti depressant medication to keep his mood at a certain level.

John suffered spiritually as a result of having religion drummed into him as a kid which had an affect of alienating himself from God and the Catholic faith in which he was brought up. He felt angry at God for many years for what he had suffered in the name of religion.

(Q16) Evidence – medical treatment, hospitalisation, other services

Nil

(Q17) Abuse reported

Nil

(Q18) Details of persons believed to have harmed the client

Refer to form

(Q19) Any further information

Nil

Copies of documents as listed:

1. ID – Drivers licence

Report assisted by CBERS Redress counsellor Dennis Tierney
11.05.2008