



Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name Karen Gale Barwick

Address REDACTED

Occupation Unemployed

Date 11 September 2013

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. My full name is Karen Gale Barwick. My date of birth is 21st June 1963.
3. From approximately 2007 I was employed by the Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service (HACS). Initially I held a casual role as an assessment officer to assess potential foster carers but later that role became a permanent one for me.
4. From 2010 my role was as a special projects manager with HACS. This role involved me going into the Aboriginal community to seek potential foster carers. I had a team of assessors who undertook an assessment process of potential foster carers. My role also included overseeing the HACS caseworkers by being on-call for after-hours support. The on-call period was for a week at a time and if there were any issues that arose in respect of a child their caseworker could contact me.
5. Ted Lancaster was a manager at the same level of seniority at HACS as me. He supervised the caseworkers overall and also the Human Resources manager, Adrian Elliot. The CEO of HACS,

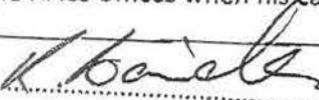
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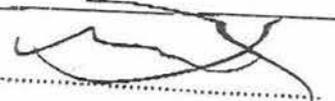
Karen Gale Barwick

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- Steve Larkins, was at the top of that hierarchy and direct supervisor of Mr Lancaster, Mr Elliot and me.
6. I have been shown a ten page document entitled "Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services Inc, Policy and Procedure Manual, Section 1.1: Intake, Assessment and Placement". The document is attached to this statement and is marked "A". It is my recollection that the Policy and Procedure Manual of which this document formed part was used at HACS at the end of 2010 and the beginning on 2011 and I was familiar with the manual at those times.
7. It is my recollection that the process of assessment of foster carers was the six steps which are set out at the foot of page 3 of Attachment "A". The remaining pages of that document set out in further detail the way each of those steps is to be undertaken.
8. I have been shown a ten page document entitled "Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services Inc, Policy and Procedure Manual, Section 2.1: Working With Authorised Carers". The document is attached to this statement and is marked "B". This document is a further component of the Policy and Procedure Manual referred to in paragraph [6] above.
9. Having refreshed my memory from Attachment "B" I recall that there was a process for the application and approval of authorised carers (also known as foster carers). I also recall that there was a process in place (by reference to page 8 of Attachment "B") for the training and support of carers before the placement started, and ongoing supervision and support of the carer during the placement. The Policy and Procedure Manual required that the planning for the placement was to begin after the preparation of a case plan.
10. At some time before December 2010, although I do not recall precisely when, I came to know of a boy for whom HACS had arranged placement, named AD . I would occasionally see him at the HACS offices when his caseworker brought him there to meet with our psychologist. I

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recall that his caseworker was Ian Eggins. I did not have any direct supervisory role of Mr Eggins or in respect of AD.

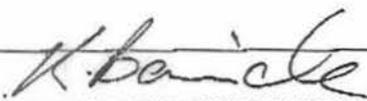
11. It was the usual practice at HACS to have a weekly meeting with Mr Larkins, Mr Elliot, Mr Lancaster and me, to discuss general operational matters. Occasionally issues relating to a specific child would be raised at those weekly meetings. It may be that, in the course of these meetings, AD was discussed generally but I did not have any direct discussions about his case management with his case worker.

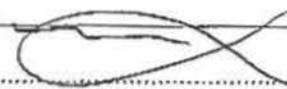
12. I recall being present during a conversation between Mr Eggins and Mr Lancaster in which Mr Eggins was discussing concerns he had regarding certain text messages, however I do not recall when this was and I do not recall any specific text messages mentioned in the conversation.

13. I recall becoming aware at some stage that there were problems with AD missing appointments, missing school, not doing as he was told and absconding from his residential care placement in REDACT. However I do not recall when I learnt these things or from whom.

14. Sometime in December 2010 I had a discussion with Simon Walsh who was a staff member at the REDACT facility where AD was in care. I recall that he asked me to discuss with Mr Larkins the possibility of AD going to live with him. I recall that Simon Walsh told me that he was concerned that AD had been leaving REDACT and had been going to Mr Larkins' house and that it would be better for him to live there to prevent him travelling the streets to get there.

15. I was not concerned by this development at the time as Mr Larkins had told me that he was related to AD and I understand it to be an aspect of Aboriginal culture for children to stay with uncles, aunts and cousins to sleep.

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16. I recall that around this time Mr Larkins had made clear to me and to a number of other people at HACS that he had parental responsibility for AD by reason of being the CEO of HACS. He stated this on a number of occasions and I took this to mean that he had overall responsibility for AD's day-to-day, short and long term decision making. I also understood this to mean that AD could live with him.

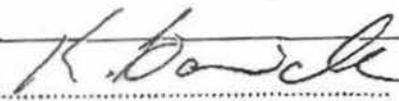
17. I have been shown a two page document entitled "Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services Inc, Daily Case Note". The document is attached to this statement and is marked "C". This document was prepared by me on or about 13 January 2011 following events on 7 January 2011. I was acting as the On-Call Manager at the time Ted Lancaster was on leave.

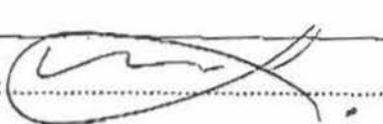
18. In or about January 2011 Mr Lancaster was on leave and HACS was operating with a skeleton staff in the post-Christmas period. I recall that on or about 7 January 2011 I received a telephone call from Mr Larkins and it is the details of that telephone call which are recorded in Attachment "C".

19. I did not consider it inappropriate for AD to attend the birthday party of Mr Larkins' mother.

20. I also recall that following this conversation with Mr Larkins, I telephoned AD's caseworker at REDACT who was named REDAC. My conversation with her is also recorded in document C.

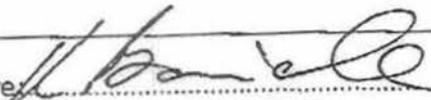
21. I have been shown a three page document headed "Integro Partners" which I recognise as a statement prepared by me in conjunction with that law firm in or about August 2011. The document is attached to this statement and is marked "D". Whilst this copy of the document is not dated specifically and is unsigned and incomplete I recall that I did sign a complete version of it. I assume the signed copy was retained by that firm. I cannot be certain that the document did not extend beyond these three pages.

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22. Having refreshed my memory from Attachment "D" I say that the conversation referred to in paragraphs [16] to [17] are a reference to the same conversation with Mr Larkins set out in the Attachment "C" case note. Further, paragraphs [18] to [19] of my statement to Integroe lawyers are a reference to the same conversation with [REDACTED] as set out in the Attachment "C" case note.
23. I have been shown a two page document titled "Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services Inc, Daily Case Note". The document is attached to this statement and is marked "E". This document was prepared by me on or about 13 January 2011 following events on 10 January 2011.
24. Having read Attachment "D" I say that the meeting referred to in paragraphs [20] to [21] is a reference to the same meeting referred to in the Attachment "E" case note, and the events that followed that meeting.
25. I recall that at the meeting on 10 January 2011 I stated to those present that it would be up to [AD] as to whether he wished to go and live with Mr Larkins. It was not uncommon for the process of child placement to be a child-driven process. Accordingly, I did not see a difficulty in allowing [AD] to decide whether he wished to live with Mr Larkins full time. I recall that at the conclusion of the meeting at [REDACTED] that it was agreed that the [REDACTED] staff would contact me to tell me of [AD]'s wishes which they did. [AD] then moved in with Mr Larkins the same day.
26. I do not recall there being a HACS policy to prevent a HACS employee from becoming a foster carer to a child for whom HACS had parental responsibility. On reflection I can understand why such a policy would be appropriate and now I do not consider that an employee of HACS (or a similar organisation), in particular its CEO, should be allowed to provide foster care to a child under the parental responsibility of the organisation.

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27. At the time that AD moved in with Mr Larkins there had not been a case plan prepared and Mr Larkins had not undergone any assessment process. I thought at or about this time that such a process should take place however I did not take any steps myself to develop a case plan in respect of AD's placement with Mr Larkins.

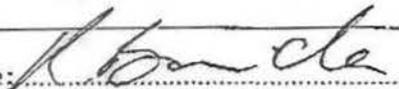
28. To my knowledge none of the six steps set out on page 3 of Attachment "B" were undertaken in respect of Mr Larkins in relation to the placement of AD.

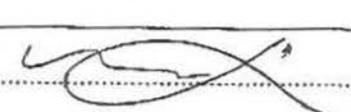
29. As far as I am aware there was no case plan or assessment process engaged in by HACS, Mr Eggins, Mr Lancaster or any other appropriate person in respect of AD's placement with Mr Larkins.

30. Having refreshed my memory from Attachment "D", at some stage following AD being placed with Mr Larkins I asked one of my staff members, Lorraine Smith, to undertake an assessment of Mr Larkins. I accept that she told me that she had approached Mr Larkins to undertake a Working with Children Checks (WWCC) and that he had told her "No, no, no" and that she should undertake this in respect of the other HACS foster carers first.

31. I was not aware as to whether Mr Larkins had undertaken a WWCC, but I assumed that as the CEO of HACS that he naturally would have had a WWCC and that it would be clear. Had Lorraine Smith ultimately received a WWCC for Mr Larkins, I would have received it from her as her supervisor which I did not.

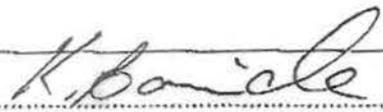
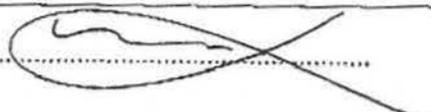
32. From my review of Attachment "D", in particular paragraph [26], I recall that around this time I approached Mr Larkins and asked him for the telephone number of the Chairperson of the HACS Management Committee, Karen Elphick. Ordinarily, where an assessment takes place, it would then go to CEO of HACS to approve it on a final basis. I considered that Mr Larkins should not provide an approval to his own assessment and I intended to have Ms Elphick do so.

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33. Mr Larkins refused to give me Ms Elphick's telephone number and I did not pursue the matter further.
34. Upon reflection I recognise the difficulty with the CEO being the subject of assessment and approval process that needed to be performed by employees under him.
35. In my experience it was a HACS priority to maintain the placement of children within the Aboriginal community, and this sometimes took priority over the assessment process if there was the option of placing children with 'kinship carers', such as uncles and aunts or other extended family members. In such cases there would often be no assessment undertaken in respect of the family into which they had been placed. At other times the assessment would take place after the placement had occurred.
36. There was a strong emphasis placed on increasing the number of carers and the number of children into placements and this took priority over the assessment process. I accept that it isn't in the best interests of a child if they are placed into a home which is not then favourably assessed.
37. During my time at HACS there were changes implemented to improve procedures and this included through the involvement of the Department of Community Services (DOCS) and the Children's Guardian. This included staff training as to how to assess risk factors and ensuring that there were WWCCs undertaken before a child is placed, and going to the placement home and talking throughout the process before the child went into the home. On my arrival at HACS none of those things were taking place.
38. I don't recall there being any written document which outlined the difficulties in HACS procedures or identified the areas to be rectified.

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39. I was not aware, until recently, that there had been an extraordinary meeting of the HACS Management Committee held in January 2011 to discuss the placement of AD with Mr Larkins.

40. I recall that Mr Lancaster returned to his role from leave towards the end of January 2011. In or about April 2011 I became aware that Mr Larkins had been arrested. I was told of the arrest, although I do not recall by whom. Between the time of Mr Lancaster's return and Mr Larkins' arrest I do not recall being aware of any further developments involving AD and Mr Larkins.

Signed: *K. Barwick*

Date: *11/9/13*

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Date: *11/9/13*