



Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name	Alicia Dellaca
Address	8 Jacaranda Road, Caringbah, New South Wales
Occupation	Child Care Coordinator, Caringbah YMCA
Date	26 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 Alicia Dellaca. My date of birth is 9 August 1985.
3. I am currently a casual child care assistant at the Young Man's Christian Association NSW ("YMCA") Caringbah branch. I have held various child care roles with YMCA Caringbah since approximately 2005. My initial role was as an assistant child carer at the YMCA Caringbah satellite before and after school centre at Our Lady of Fatima. My manager was Jacqui Barnat, who is now the Children's Services Coordinator for the Caringbah YMCA.
4. I was approximately 21 years of age when I started with YMCA Caringbah. I had no child care qualifications or experience at that time. I was undertaking some casual work at a café at the time. My mother was employed by YMCA Caringbah to work in the office there. At the time she was speaking with Natalie Robinson (who was the coordinator of the YMCA before and after school care centre in Lilli Pilli) and I understand that Natalie told my mother that she was "*desperately short staffed*". My mother told her that I didn't have any qualifications but that I

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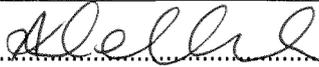
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would be finished work by 3pm and could help out if Natalie needed help. I started my first shift that afternoon and undertook a number of casual shifts.

5. Sometime later when I returned from travel, I heard from my mother that one of the YMCA Caringbah child care centres was looking for an assistant. I recall expressing interest in the role. I don't recall if it was advertised or not but I know that I didn't submit a resume. I don't recall being asked for references, details of referees, or to provide 100 points of identification.
6. At the time I still did not have any qualifications, but in the time since commencing employment with YMCA Caringbah I have gained an equivalent Certificate IV in Out of School Hours Care (commenced approximately 2 years after I started with YMCA). This was done through Wave Learning, an external training provider. I also now have a Bachelor of Arts obtained from the University of Western Sydney in 2012 and I am currently studying my Masters of Primary Education at the University of Western Sydney.
7. I recall there was some component of the Certificate IV equivalency which related to child protection. At some time later I attended some child protection training through an external training place called Network, though this was attended by people from other organisations too and was not just YMCA specific. I recall reading the statistics and thinking to myself that I should be vigilant because potentially the numbers meant that one of the children in a centre could be being abused. I understood that the stereotypical abuser was a family member and on reflection it really didn't occur to me that it could be someone within the organisation. Also I believed that paedophiles were older. I thought it was some sort of act of desperation, not a form of sexual orientation. It would not have occurred to me that a good looking 24 year old would be involved in child sexual abuse.

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8. Until I undertook the Certificate IV equivalency, everything I learnt about child care I learnt 'on the job', predominantly from modelling the behaviour of Jacqui Barnat. I was basically a blank canvas, I did not even have younger siblings or cousins. I looked up to Jacqui Barnat upon commencement with the YMCA. I knew she had been in the industry for a long time and was diploma trained. I assumed that if I did as she did, then I would be in line with what the YMCA expected and with proper practice.
9. I recall that not long after I started at YMCA Caringbah as a permanent assistant, we were undergoing some sort of accreditation. It was in this context that I first became aware that there was an assortment of policies and procedures. I recall being told that I should familiarise myself with the policies when I had a chance in my spare time (when the centre was quiet), in case an accreditor came to the centre and asked me about things. At the time I really didn't even understand the link between the written policies and the way we were supposed to conduct ourselves. There wasn't much reflection of the policies in day-to-day practice. I understood that the policies really existed for the purposes of obtaining the accreditation.
10. If I had a query about something, I would just pick up the phone and ask Jacqui. I observed this is what most workers did. Otherwise I just followed what Jacqui or the other staff did.
11. I do not recall that my knowledge of the policies was ever checked or documented. I recall that at some time in early to mid-2012, we were asked to retrospectively sign off on the fact that we had read the policies. I have been shown an induction checklist document dated May 2011 relating to John Lord. It is my understanding that John would have checked this sheet off himself to say that he was compliant with the policies. It was my understanding that most centre staff did this around that time.

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12. I do not recall being made aware of a YMCA code of conduct. I do not recall ever seeing such a document displayed in any of the centres. We did display a different policy each week for parents on a notice board near the "sign-in/out" table. This would usually be whichever was next in order in the policy folder. At the beginning of the week I would change over the policy that was on display. The board upon which the policy was displayed was usually extremely full of different paperwork and posters.
13. In or about early October 2011, I became aware that allegations had been raised by parents against a member of the YMCA Caringbah child care staff, whom I subsequently became aware was Jonathan (John) Lord. It was apparent to me very quickly that John Lord was the staff member involved, although it took some time for anyone to confirm this to me. For a number of days following his initial arrest, Jacqui Barnat would call me and ask me if I could fill in at Caringbah Public School in the afternoon, and then I'd get a message from her at 6.30pm asking me to be back there in the morning. This went on for days without her confirming to me the reason for his absence.
14. Upon reflection and further training, there were signs of unusual behaviour by John Lord. Firstly, I now realise that child protection training was given to the child care supervisors of the YMCA, but it was left up to us to each pass this knowledge down to our assistants. This meant that when John was a coordinator he held the information which would have potentially alerted his assistant to some of the warning signs. I recall working with John Lord one Thursday afternoon at the St Pat's centre and he said to me *"I think that it's just so bizarre that they say it's important to build strong relationships with families and kids and to be a good role model for them yet the rules say "don't let kids come close to you" and "don't do this or that". I said to him "You can have a strong relationship as a role model with them without physically touching them, it's about*

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protecting yourself and the children.” I remember thinking to myself “this isn’t rocket science John, why is this even a dilemma.”

15. I recall that for some time in 2011 John would attend the St Pat’s centre during before school care even though he was not rostered to work. He explained that he was doing a design course or something and that if he didn’t park nearby early, he couldn’t get a parking space for the train station. I thought this was odd. I enjoy working with children but I thought it was unusual that someone would want to be at work just hanging around when they didn’t have to (particularly as that wasn’t his usual centre).

16. I also recall that the first time I ever worked with him he gave me a speech in words to the effect of *“I didn’t have a great relationship with my dad and I have a real soft spot for kids, boys especially. When they don’t have great father figures in their lives I just want to be a stable male role model for them. I think it’s really important, I am thinking about becoming a social worker.”*

17. At the time it seemed genuine, but of course knowing what I now do, it was unusual. He also used to stay longer at vacation care. I would say to him *“Your shift is done”* and he would tell me he was going to stay until he’d finished the game he was playing or the drawing he was helping a child with.

18. I also recall he used to have particular children who were his favourites. I remember in particular that he used to baby sit for AF. He would also pay AF particular attention in after school care. He would say *“Hey AF why don’t you come and help me get the sports equipment out”* which was unusual because he didn’t actually need help getting the equipment and AF should have been sitting with the other children. Having read the sentencing report, I wondered if AF was going to be one of the children he abused. I also remember one particular vacation care excursion where I had put John in charge of a group of ten girls who were 5-7 years old. He kept trying to switch

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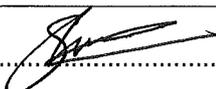
groups or switch some of the boys into his group on the basis that one of them was upset. It was easy to dismiss these things at the time, however given that he was one of the only male staff members and of course the little boys would like to do "boy stuff" like play sport. I also recall that he would position himself in activities so that he was with particular children.

19. Again, on reflection, John did sometimes have children on his lap. At the time I didn't think it was suspicious by itself, but I did think that it wasn't a good look, as it made it look to the other children that he had favourites. In particular when he would be sitting on a chair with a child on his lap when all the other children were on the floor at his feet. I would sometimes pull him up on this by telling the child to sit on their bottom on the floor.

20. When I first commenced with YMCA, I was not aware of any prohibition on staff babysitting for children who were associated with the YMCA centres. It was considered to be an ok form of earning some extra money. After a while it was something that was accepted but not really spoken about. Given that I modelled my conduct on that of Jacqui Barnat, I didn't think there was a difficulty with babysitting and I would babysit for families myself. I know that Jacqui babysat for families, because aside from hearing her discussing arrangements with various parents in advance of her babysitting, there was one family that she babysat for who she eventually stopped with. She then recommended me to the mother to take over from her as their regular babysitter.

21. I was aware the John Lord babysat for YMCA families but, as discussed above, I did not consider it to be unusual at all. As a coordinator, John would have had the ability to sign children in and out of care on the official sheet, although this would not have raised suspicion as the coordinator for each satellite centre had the responsibility for entering the data from those sheets into the Qikkid system and then the hard copy sheets were stored at the satellite centre.

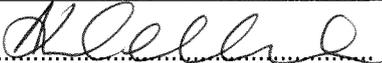
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22. Since the John Lord incident, there has been a crack-down on this conduct though and I know that at least one staff member has received an official warning from the YMCA for babysitting a YMCA child.
23. This form of change is not unusual. I recall last year was an incident where my alarm did not go off and I was 10 minutes late to the before schoolcare shift. I telephoned Alicia Noble (the other staff member on shift that morning) on the way to tell her that I was going to be late and Alicia said no problems. However, because this was after the John Lord incident, the first parent there was concerned that there was only one staff member on duty. She telephone Jacqui to complain. I was then called in for a meeting with Jacqui Barnat and Liam Whitley and I was officially reprimanded and warned because I had breached the policy which required there to be more than one staff member on duty at any one time. Of course I understood this, but it was out of my control and was simply an accident. Also, as I live so close to the centre, by the time I telephoned Jacqui I would still have reached the centre before anyone else could have in any event.
24. There was a further difficulty with this incident. The reason it was so apparent to the parent in question that there was only one staff member there was because when they arrived, they were all locked out of the centre. This is because I was the only person with keys to the centre.
25. The other person who has keys to that centre is John Lord. The keys were not retrieved from him at the time of his suspension from duties, or after any of his arrests. He also still has his YMCA uniform. This was raised by me in the course of the meeting referred to in paragraph 23 above. During that meeting Liam Whitley said to me words to the effect: *"There's another reason why it is so important for you to be on time – you're the only one with keys"*.

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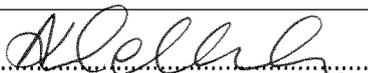
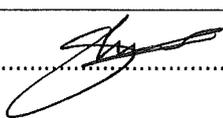
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26. I replied *"Yes! I am the only person who has a set of keys because the other set is still with John!"*

Liam Whitely asked why this was and I replied *"Well I don't know. They were with him when he was arrested the first time and actually, it's quite concerning. You are coming down on me for being late, and that's fair enough, but you know he was arrested and released and he still had the keys and the uniform. He had full access to Caringbah Public School including the alarm system. You still haven't retrieved to keys."* Liam Whitely said he did not want to discuss this further. I am of the view this was because I was recording the meeting (a fact about which I had informed him and Jacqui at the start of the meeting) as I did not have a support person present.

27. I am not sure whether YMCA have told the Principal of Caringbah Public School that John Lord still has keys. It is of particular concern because the set of keys which open the before and after school care room also includes keys that can access any part of the school, including the alarm. I assume the locks haven't been changed as the keys still work and haven't been replaced by anyone. As at the date of this statement, there is still only one set of keys to Caringbah Public School.

28. Until such time as the procedures at the YMCA were tightened (following the allegations against John Lord) I understood there were certain incidents that required mandatory reporting, however I understood from YMCA that this would be satisfied by me reporting it to someone more senior than myself. Since the John Lord incident, if I felt my mandatory reporting publications arose I would ring DoCS myself. I would feel more confident knowing that I had taken the matter outside of the YMCA. I feel it is a very close-knit organisation and that staff and management are two different teams. I would not feel that I had fully complied with my mandatory report publications until I had taken the matter outside the YMCA.

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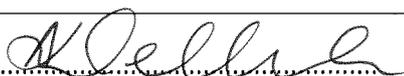
29. This is more so since the dismissal of Catharine Clements. She was hired as a Child Protection Officer for YMCA after the John Lord incident, but was dismissed about 6 months later. My understanding of her role was that she was really there to support the staff in the aftermath of what occurred with John Lord. I observed her to be outside of the management culture and to be genuinely caring towards the Caringbah staff. I recall that when we had a training day in or about December 2011 we were invited by the facilitator to write any questions we had just before the lunch break on post it notes and to stick them up on a wall. I was a bit cheeky and I wrote:

"On what grounds was Catharine Clements dismissed, and is there a plan for a new child protection officer"

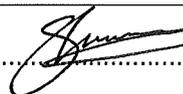
30. As we broke for lunch, I saw Jacqui Barnat outside the room being harassed by the managers who were demanding to know whose handwriting was on the post-it note that I had written. Jacqui told them that she wouldn't disclose who it was. The question was not addressed in the afternoon session.

31. I am not sure why it surprised the YMCA that the Caringbah staff were unhappy or felt unsupported. They basically put us in the "firing line" of understandably irate parents, but at the same time they banned us from saying anything. Within a fortnight of the allegations being made against John Lord, during a staff meeting, a number of YMCA office and child care staff were made to sign a confidentiality agreement, which stated that we wouldn't speak about this matter at all. I felt like I had no choice but to sign the agreement. So having signed the confidentiality agreement, I know I felt that I wasn't allowed to discuss any detail of the incident, including to confirm that it was John who was involved, or otherwise.

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32. In the days following the allegations being made against Jonathan Lord, I recall being at the St Patrick's centre with Chloe Starr who answered the telephone and I could hear a parent screaming on the other end of the phone. She said words to the effect "*Please say it wasn't John. Chloe I gave him the keys to my house*". I could hear her howling on the other end of the phone and Chloe was looking at me and had no idea what she was allowed to say to this woman who was clearly very, very distressed. So Chloe said to her the only thing we had been told to tell parents, namely words to the effect "*If you have concerns, maybe talk to your child about it.*" I was really uncomfortable with this approach. It seemed incredibly cold to say to these people whose lives were falling apart "*go and talk to your child*".
33. I observed that the Caringbah staff member who had the most difficult time during the period following John Lord's arrest was John Lord's assistant at Caringbah Public School, Danielle Ockwell. Danielle was faced with ropeable parents on a daily basis and was not prepared for it. The parents verbally attacked her because she was a familiar face. In the first week after John was arrested for the first time, I asked Danielle what she was saying to parents. She told me that Jacqui Barnat had instructed her to tell parents that John Lord was on holidays, I asked her "*How can you say he's on holidays?! When everything comes out we will look ridiculous!*"
34. The children at the Caringbah Public School centre also wondered where John was. Their level of curiosity depended on what they had been told by their parents. Some parents had said nothing (and initially had not even heard anything). Other parents seemed to have discussed things with their children with varying levels of truthfulness and some children would say that John was "in jail" and some would said "*he did rude things to kids*". Whenever children asked me I would just say that John "*doesn't work in this job anymore*", but I didn't say more, or explain why.

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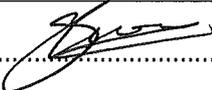


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35. Any time YMCA managers would meet with any of us, we would be told that YMCA *"operates above industry standard"*. There would be a spiel from management justifying the way they had acted and I just wanted them to speak to us like we're real people and not be so worried about trying to avoid blame. We needed support to deal with the situation and look at how to improve moving forward. Management seemed more concerned with avoiding the blame. My view was that this was people's children and they had every right to be distressed. You can't look a mother in the eye who is crying because she suspects her child has been abused and said *"Well we are operating above industry standard"*, that approach just seems heartless.
36. I felt at the time there was no way of voicing this concern. I was very worried that my shifts would be cut back if I said anything. I was very apprehensive about speaking out. It was in this context that the support offered by Catharine Clements was really valuable. But not long after the group meeting where the Caringbah staff got to say how unsupported they felt, I discovered from Jacqui Barnat that Catharine Clements had been let go by YMCA.
37. A further aspect of change since the John Lord incident relates to the bus travel between YMCA centres. John used to drive the bus alone, and also drive children in his car to and from centres and activities. After John was suspended from duties Jacqui started driving the bus and continued to do so until a month or so ago when they hired a permanent driver named Tony. I felt quite sorry for him because he's a nice retired fellow who obviously thought he would be taking a quiet community job and he's faced with mothers bursting into tears saying *"I don't trust you and I don't want you near my kids"*. He still does the bus route alone though.
38. I couldn't really even understand why it was that the bus driver could be alone with the kids when the policy at the centres was no less than two staff at a time. I recall asking Liam why this

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was during the meeting referred to in paragraph 23, he replied "*The parents sign a waiver to say that they give permission for their child to be alone with the bus driver.*"

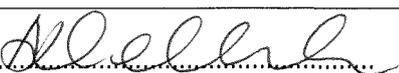
39. At some time after that, at the commencement of a new school year I was asked to give those waiver forms out to parents to say that they gave permission. When they would return them I would just place them on the individual kids' files.

Signed: 

Date: 26/9/13

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