



Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name Sheree Ockwell
Address 5 Jacaranda Place, Caringbah
Occupation Coordinator, Children's Services, YMCA NSW
Date 4 October 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 Sheree Lauren Ockwell. My date of birth is 15 April 1985.
3. I am currently a children's services coordinator at the Young Man's Christian Association NSW (YMCA) Lilli Pilli branch. My role involves running the before and after school care service at the Lilli Pilli centre, looking after my centre and doing the administration, paper work, accounts, dealing with parent enquiries and supervising my assistant, Shannon Noble.
4. I left high school halfway through year 11 and did a traineeship at Bay Road Kindergarten, Gymea where I got my Certificate III in Community Services/Children's Services. While I was studying for that, and as part of my practical training, I worked for a year in the kindergarten and long day whilst I was doing my traineeship.
5. In or about 2006 a friend of mine sent me a text saying that he knew there was a before and after school care job going at the Caringbah YMCA. I dropped my CV around to the Caringbah office and then had an interview with Jacqui Barnat ("Jacqui") and the Children's Services Manager at the time, Natalie. My interview was about 20 or 30 minutes. They asked me about

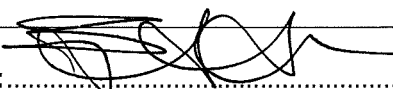
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my previous work, my references, and they asked me about what I would do in a few scenarios, which I remember I was a bit nervous about answering. I think the scenarios were about things like what I would do if a child had an epileptic fit. I did two trial shifts, one time without uniform where I assisted two other staff on shift, and another shift in uniform, where it was just me and the supervisor.

6. I got the job and started as a childcare assistant at the Lilli Pilli centre, with Natalie as my manager. Even though I went from working full time in an accountancy firm to permanent-part time at the YMCA, which was about 25-30 hours a week, I was happy to do it because I wanted a career in childcare. After starting as an assistant, I became supervisor at the Lilli Pilli centre in or about 2007. I became a coordinator on or about 30 June 2011.
7. When I first started at the YMCA I do not recall having an induction or any training day. I think I just learned and picked everything up as I went along.
8. I don't recall when I first became aware of the YMCA policy folder, but I think we have always had one. It is only more recently that we have had to 'sign off' on the policies. I think that came in or about mid-2011. This was around the same time that I had a bit of an incident with Jacqui. On or about 30 June 2011 I was being asked to sign a contract to go from being a supervisor to a coordinator, I was accused by Anne Mary Nolan, Mary Ann (who worked for Anne Mary) and Jacqui of speaking to Jacqui inappropriately in the hallway. I was asked to go straight into an office with the three of them to have my staff appraisal. I said that I wasn't ready and that they couldn't just spring it on me, that they had to give me notice on the appraisal. But they carried on with the appraisal anyway and I think they filled out the form without showing it to me. We usually have a performance appraisal once a year, but just with Jacqui and a manager.

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9. At the end of that meeting I was asked to sign an appraisal form, which I did. I was not given a copy of the form at that time. When I did receive a copy of the form, I believed that 2 points (items 2 and 3) had been added to the "Outline Reason for Meeting" section. A copy of the document I received back is attached and marked "A". Had points 2 and 3 been on the form at the time of signing, I would not have signed it. I questioned the points having been added and demanded a copy of the minutes of the meeting. A copy of that document is attached and marked "B".
10. After that incident, we had a meeting where I said that if they were going to enforce policies they should let us know what they were in the first place so we knew what we were meant to do. I think that's when they started asking us to sign the policies, so that they could cover themselves.
11. We have never had extensive training on the policies, and they have never been very clear. I have read all of the policies, but if an incident happened I would always have to refer to the policy book to refresh my memory on the relevant policy. In most situations I would know what to do, but I would still refer to the policy book. I am aware of the Code of Conduct, but I wouldn't know what was in it off the top of my head.
12. I can't recall doing any child protection training as part of my Certificate III. We may have discussed it in some subjects, but it is a long time ago and I can't recall learning much that was specific. I do remember doing some training about child protection after the Jonathan Lord incident. I think we did something a few weeks or months after the allegations came out, although I wouldn't really call it training. It was a session run by the YMCA, I am not sure if it was for only Caringbah staff or for the rest of the region as well. I think that Anne Mary Nolan may have run the session. It didn't really tell me anything that I didn't already know. They said things like, we shouldn't hug the kids or have them sitting on our laps, but I wouldn't allow those types

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of things at my centre anyway. I know to remove myself if there is a situation with the kids that I feel uncomfortable with. I do remember feeling pretty offended at that session, that the scenarios referred to a child called 'Little Johnny'. I remember thinking that after everything that had happened, that was inappropriate.

13. I don't recall going to a coordinator's training day run by the YMCA in July 2011.

Working with Jonathan Lord

14. When Jonathan Lord ("John") first started at the YMCA, I was a coordinator at the Lilli Pilli centre.

I helped to train him up a bit when he first started, when he was a casual at my centre. The coordinators act as a bit of a model for the assistants, as the assistants can learn how to do things by watching what the coordinators do. I would have mostly trained him on the routine of the centre, like how to make afternoon tea and where everything was.

15. I have been shown a two page document entitled 'Telephone Reference Check', which is a form dated 21 August 2009. A true copy of that document is attached and marked "C". I think that the handwriting on the top section of that form and the signature at the end of the form is Jacqui Barnat's. I think that the handwriting in the body of the form is mine. I have no memory of filling in that form or being part of a telephone reference check for John Lord. I assume that I would have had to be on the call to fill out the form, but I have no memory of it. I don't remember being involved in any other part of John Lord's recruitment.

16. I recall that when I commenced with YMCA I gave details of two referees who would provide references for me. Maggie Lent called one of my referees. A copy of the reference check she completed is attached and marked "D". I recognise the handwriting as being Maggie's and her signature on the third and final page of that document.

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17. Somebody, although I cannot now recall who, asked me to complete a telephone reference check of my own referee and to complete the relevant form. A copy of the reference check I completed is attached and marked "E". I did not sign it but I recognise the handwriting as my own.
18. I haven't had any training about taking references, doing interviews, staff recruitment, or human resources, and these are not normally part of my job. I don't recall having taken a telephone reference at any other time other than those referred to in paragraphs [15] to [17] above. I did my first interview of a potential new staff member on Friday 13 September 2013. I didn't have any training, Jacqui was just a person short and instead of having to cancel the interview, I said that I was happy to sit in on the interview and learn. I think that it is a policy to have two people in an interview. I asked half of the questions. I think that my sister, Danielle Ockwell ("Danielle") may have also sat in on a few interviews with Jacqui.
19. I didn't know John before he started at the YMCA, but after he started we became friends. Everyone loved him – the staff, the kids, and the office staff. We all thought he was a lovely boy. The kids seemed happy and he was good at his job.
20. Until the allegations against John, I never thought that there was anything wrong with him. I never saw him touch any of the kids inappropriately or do anything unusual. I don't recall seeing John with his phone on shift, but I mainly worked with him when he was quite new so he may have been a bit stricter with the rules when I was with him. My sister, Danielle Ockwell never said to me that she had seen anything unusual about this behaviour either.
21. Since the allegations against John, we can be fired on the spot if we are seen with a mobile phone on shift. I am not sure if there was really a policy about having no phones before the John Lord incident, back then I would have usually had my phone in my pocket and just checked it

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quickly if I got a text. But now the policy about phones is strictly enforced, especially with the iPhones that have cameras on and video cameras.

22. Before the allegations, I did know that John was babysitting kids from the centre. He said that he used to babysit some of the kids for free on the weekends, because some of the single mums needed a hand. We all thought it was so lovely that he was helping out. I knew there was a policy against babysitting kids from the centre, but everybody used to do it including Jacqui, myself and other people I knew. There was no attempt to keep it a secret, people would talk about it openly. I think that Jacqui would have known that John was babysitting on the weekends, although I can't be sure.

23. After the allegations against John, I was told that I would be dismissed instantly if I ever babysat any of the kids from the centre again. I had to speak with Jacqui because I babysit for a long-time family friend who also has friends in the centre. In the end Anne Mary Nolan was asked to make an exception Jacqui later told me that I was allowed to babysit for that family. I ceased all other babysitting for children from the YMCA.

The allegations about Jonathan Lord

24. I didn't work in vacation care for the school holidays when all the allegations against John were made. I was first aware that something may be up because I came back to work at the start of term and John wasn't there. I received a letter (which may also have been emailed to me) in or about early October 2011 saying that John was taking a leave of absence. I thought that something might have happened to his family so I called him. He didn't answer so I left a voice message.

25. On or about 12 October 2011 we were called in for a meeting and we were made to sign a confidentiality agreement. I think that Liam Whitley, Anne Mary Nolan, Shane Demir, Jacqui and

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Phillip Hare were there. I think they said that allegations had been made about a staff member. They didn't say who but I put it together because John wasn't there. They didn't say what the allegations were or who it was to do with. I feel like I was forced to sign the paper, and now I feel like I should have spoken up about why we were being made to sign it. I was shocked at the time. I still feel shocked about it all.

26. I was scared and I believed we all were. We had all worked with John and some of us were friends with him. I didn't know what had happened and although we weren't meant to talk with each other, most staff were really close friends and, personally I needed to talk about what was going on, so we all spoke with each other in the car park, trying to work out what was going on.

27. At some point we were offered counselling. We were in a meeting all together and asked to be able to have group counselling, but one of the managers said that we were only allowed to have individual counselling because it might have affected the case in the courts otherwise. I don't think anybody went to the individual counselling. Personally I didn't want to talk about these things alone.

28. I didn't feel informed about what was going on at all. At one in October 2011 a letter was sent out to parents about what was happening, but I had no idea that the parents had been told. I got a call on my personal mobile from a parent, who wanted to know what was going on. I had no idea what they had been told or what the letter said so I didn't know what to say to them. I was in the office at the time, so I said I would call them back and I asked Jacqui what was going on. I'm not even sure she knew that a letter had been sent out. She found the email that had been sent out and printed me off a paper copy to read. I'm not sure if Jacqui, me or Anne Mary called them back.

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29. I was told that if the parents asked about what was going on, I shouldn't talk with them about it or tell them anything. I have some kids that I have been looking after since kindy and parents were wanting me to let them know what was going on, but I couldn't tell them anything.
30. My sister Danielle got transferred from her centre at Caringbah and moved to the Our Lady of Fatima centre. She was told that a letter would be sent to parents, but as far as I am aware, one never was.
31. When all the allegations were emerging against John, we really needed extra staff at each centre. In my view, there should have been a person from management at each of the Caringbah centres, on standby to answer any of the parent's questions. Those members of management who did visit, just worked on a laptop doing work. They should have been there to greet the parents, so we weren't left on our own. There should have been more staff around to show the parents that their children were being well looked after and that everything was OK.

Working at the YMCA after the allegations

32. I recall that the staff were complaining about how we had been treated and I think somebody complained to Jacqui. I am not exactly sure who asked for something to be done, it could have been numerous people, because I observed most people were emotionally affected. On or about 16 October 2012 we attended a meeting of child care staff for a debrief session with Craig Hemsworth was there as a mediator. We voiced all our feelings to Craig, and said how we felt we had been badly treated. Catharine Clements was also there, she had been recently hired as a Child Protection Officer. The first debrief with Craig Hemsworth was really emotional. Everyone was in tears because it was the first time we had been able to talk about everything properly. People said how there was a big trust issue between staff and management. I think there still is a

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trust issue. Mostly people have issues with the management above Jacqui, but there are also some trust issues with Jacqui.

33. After that meeting Craig reported to management. Then we were allowed to have group counselling, and management apologised to us in or about March 2013. Catharine Clements was great, she was the only one who helped us and was a spokesperson for us. After the apology meeting, Catharine came to visit us at all the centres to see if we were OK, and bought us some flowers. It was the first time that I had felt appreciated for having coped with the situation.

34. Catharine was fired at some point and we were all really confused about why she was fired. I spoke with Jacqui about it and she just said that she was no longer needed. At a meeting on or about 7 March 2013, I asked why Catharine was fired and either Kylie Pearson or Anne Mary Nolan told me that she wasn't fulfilling her role or something, and that she wasn't even meant to come around to all the centres. I thought that was weird as she is the only one who supported us.

35. If I saw something suspicious happen at work, I would lodge it in my incident book as is my usual practice, and speak to Jacqui. I am a mandatory reporter, and if there was a child protection issue I could go to the Keep Them Safe website and lodge a report myself. Each centre should have an incident book. I record something in my centre's incident book if there is a behavioural incident, or if a child says something suspicious, something like that. Accidents and things wouldn't be logged there. I am not sure if anyone else every checks the incident book, I just have it there to refer back to and to cover myself. If I was going to put something in the book, I would also tell Jacqui about it.

36. If I wanted to say something or complain about another staff member, I would go to Jacqui. It doesn't matter that we have had our issues with each other in the past, if there was an issue at

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work I would still report it to her. If I didn't feel like I could go to her for some reason, I would go to a higher manager.

37. I don't really have any thoughts or feelings about John now. I know I wasn't happy with the sentence he received as I thought it should have been longer. At one point I wanted to go and visit him in prison and ask him what had happened. I was so confused and had no idea about what had happened and thought I wanted to just go to the source and ask him what he had done. I don't feel like that anymore. Now, my main concerns are about my sister Danielle and I just want to make sure she is OK.

Signed: S. Ockwell.

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