



Royal Commission  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

## Statement

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**Name** Sandra Joy KITCHING  
**Address** Known to the Royal Commission  
**Occupation** Aboriginal Family Worker  
**Date** 25 August 2014

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1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I would be prepared, if necessary, to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those which were used, to the best of my recollection.
3. My full name is Sandra Joy KITCHING. I was born in 1950 and I am 64 years old. I have also been known by the name Sandra GIFFORD, which was my married name.
4. I identify as being Aboriginal and as being a member of the Stolen Generation.
5. I currently live in Sydney in NSW. I work part time for a non-Government Organisation (**NGO**) called South West Child, Adolescent and Family Services (**CAFS**) as an Aboriginal Family Worker. I work as a counsellor, support worker, and Case Worker.

### Admission to Retta Dixon Home (Retta Dixon)

6. I was born in Alice Springs, Northern Territory. My mum, Nellie KELLY, is from the Gurindji People and lived in Wave Hill, Northern Territory. My father was Peter KITCHING, who was German. I never met my father. I have seen a letter that my dad wrote to the Commonwealth Government asking if he could marry mum, but in those days it was very hard for an Aboriginal

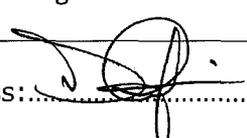
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woman to be seen with a white man. Neither the white community nor the Aboriginal community would accept them, and the Government wouldn't give you any support.

7. My mum had a total of 11 children. The first two, Elaine and Johnny, had different fathers, then Phyllis, myself and Dennis all had the same father. After Dennis came Eddie, Jennifer, Jeanie, Nella, Raylene and Shelley.
8. When I was about two years old, I was taken from my mum and put into Bagot Settlement. Under the *Welfare Act* I was made a Ward of the State and mum was told that because she was Aboriginal and had no job, she would be unable to get housing, and unable to care for the children. There was no welfare back then. Mum didn't want to give us up but the Commonwealth Government just took us. My mum was still living in Alice Springs so I was taken a long way away from her.
9. I was put in Bagot Settlement. Elaine, Johnny, Phyllis and Dennis were all put there too, but I don't know if we were taken at the same time or not. Elaine was about eight to ten years older than me and Johnny was about six to seven years older. They went to a different part of the Settlement for older kids and I never connected with them. I was with my older sister, Phyllis KITCHING, she was about one year older than me, and my younger brother, Dennis, who was about a year younger than me. The boys stayed on the boys' side and I was with Phyllis on the girls' side, though she was in a different dormitory to me.
10. Bagot Settlement was a place for full-blood Aboriginal people in Darwin. It was run by Aboriginal Inland Missions (AIM). There was a bit that was for half-caste and quarter-caste kids, which was separated from the full-bloods by a big fence. I am mixed blood so I went to that part of the settlement. It was a dormitory-style set-up and each building had about 20 kids. Older kids were separated from younger kids, and boys were separated from girls. There were rows of beds with

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a little cupboard. On the wall opposite the beds was a place you could hang your clothes with a curtain you could pull across. It was good because if you got scared, you could jump out of bed and go get in with your friend. We loved being together and because there were no separate rooms with doors, we all felt safe.

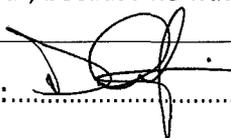
11. In my dormitory we were supervised by two single women, Ms SPOHN and Mummy DINHAM. Ms SHANKLETON was the superintendent in charge of the whole half-caste part of the settlement. Another of the supervisors was Ms CLUTTERBUCK, she looked after the nursery.

12. The full-bloods next door had more freedom than us half-castes. They got to go shopping, we didn't. We weren't even allowed to talk to the full-bloods. We only got to go to camp in the school holidays and that was right out in the bush. The Government didn't think they could do anything with the full-bloods, the traditional people, but us half-castes, we had brains so they thought they could beat the colour out of us, make us white. At least, that's the way I see it. That's why they took us from Alice Springs and put us in Darwin. They took all the Darwin kids and put them on Tiwi Island. They took us away from our land and our people.

13. My first real memory of Bagot Settlement was when I was about five years old and I started primary school. I remember catching the bus to Nightcliff Primary School. After primary school I went to Darwin High School, I think, for a year before it was closed down. Then they built a new school in Nightcliff and I went there.

14. My mum had moved up to Darwin to follow us. She was living in a little ghetto called Stuart Park, where lots of mothers used to live. They lived in corrugated iron buildings. She used to work in a laundry or she did some cleaning. My mum used to come and take Phyllis, Dennis and me out for the weekend. At first, it was once a month but eventually it was once a fortnight. That's how I knew Dennis was my brother, when mum would take us out, because he was in the boys section

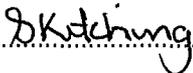
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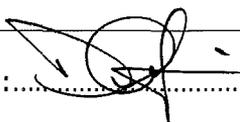
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at Bagot Settlement so I never saw him. She had to beg and beg Ms SHANKLETON to let her take us out, and we used to throw tantrums and cry because we wanted to go with mum for the weekend. Eventually she relented and let mum take us for the weekend. Ms SHANKLETON used to come in and say, 'Right, you kids are gonna see your mum this weekend, Friday night. So she's gonna come and pick you up'. Ms SHANKLETON also threatened us that if we misbehaved, we wouldn't be allowed to go. Mum would take us places the stupid Missionaries wouldn't. We learnt from mum that you had to shop for your food, and she taught us about money – because we never had money. We would also go to the pub and watch people dance. We thought it was fun and we just dreaded going back every Sunday night. This happened every month.

15. On a Sunday when we got back, we'd get drilled by Ms SHANKLETON or one of the other adults like, 'Where did youse go today? What did you do?' Phyllis and Dennis and me used to get scared and we'd be shaking and carrying on. We never told them the things we really did, we would just say we went and stayed at mum's place, or went fishing. Phyllis and I would get together with the other girls in a huddle and we would tell the other girls where we went, tell them we had ice cream. Sometimes mum would buy a packet of lollies and I would sneak it in. Some of those kids were nine, ten, 11 years old and had never had a lolly. My older brother and sister, Johnny and Elaine, never came with us, I don't know why not.

16. When I was about 12 years old the Government decided to build a cottage home. The home was called Retta Dixon Home and was a short distance up Bagot Road from Bagot Settlement. AIM ran Retta Dixon. There were seven cottages and in the middle was the Superintendent who had a two-storey house. When we moved to Retta Dixon, Ms SHANKLETON went back to being a House Parent and Mr PATTEMORE was the Superintendent.

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**Life at Retta Dixon**

17. In the dormitory we were all sisters but then they decided to split us up into different cottages.

It was a terrible idea. Each cottage had a foster mum and dad, called House Parents – I didn't want that. I had my own mum. Phyllis and Dennis were not in my cottage. Dennis was in another cottage, but Phyllis had been sent to another institution in Darwin. The House Parents referred to it as the 'naughty girls' home'. It was a place called Essington House, up near Molly Point where the hospital was. That's the last I saw of her until I got out of Retta Dixon. I heard she was sent there because she became interested in boys. I was never told that she was being sent away from Retta Dixon.

18. I was put in Cottage 1. Two of my House Parents were a couple of single ladies, Sandra GARSIDE and Kathleen (Kathy) NADEN. They came from Singleton College if I remember. They were kind of alright, but they used the cane a bit, just for little things like if you didn't come home early. I had a bit of a fight about that. I went to Ms SHANKLETON and Mr PATTEMORE about the caning and said, 'This is ridiculous', but nothing happened. They either caned you on the hand or on the back of the legs. I only got caned once, on the hand, and it really hurt. After that I said to myself, 'No-one's ever going to do that to me again.' If someone went to cane me, I said, 'Don't do it because I'm going to hit you. You hit me, I'm going to hit you.' So I used to end up scrubbing the floor or doing the washing up for months. The other kids got caned though.

**Abuse by Mr POUNDER**

19. When Sandra GARSIDE and Kathy NADEN left Retta Dixon, Mr POUNDER, his wife Mary, and their three kids came to be House Parents at Cottage 1. I was about 14 or 15 years old when Mr POUNDER came. He was a big bloke and was very cruel. He would make us clean the whole house before school – washing up, laundry, hanging out the laundry and mopping the floor. We

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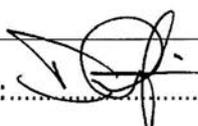
complained that it made us tired for school but he continued to make us do it. If we back-chatted him or complained to Mr PATTEMORE, he would chain us to the bed and leave us chained up until we were sincerely sorry for what we did. When you were chained up you couldn't sit properly or sleep and he would take off our clothes, so we would only be wearing our pants, like big bloomers.

20. There was no lock on the bathroom door. When I had a shower in the morning Mr POUNDER would barge in and he'd pull me to him and sniff me and say, 'You didn't use soap'. I would try to pull away and say, 'Hey!' and I would be trembling and shaking. He did it twice to me and I know he did it to at least some of the other girls. We started showering together and when he came in we would face our backs to him. He tried to stop us showering together but I said, 'No, I don't care what you say, you're a terrible person and you are disgusting.' He would say, 'Yeah, well Aboriginal people should use soap and I am going to stand here and watch you.' I said to this other girl, REDACTE 'We need to go and see his wife, this is not on.'

21. Not long after Mr POUNDER went to Church one day, REDACTE and I got his wife and I pushed her up against the wall – we shouldn't have done that. I said, 'You better tell your husband to stop staring at us, it's not about soap, okay?' She said, 'My husband will get on to you. You just leave me alone.' I said, 'Well, you tell him to leave us alone!' She didn't do anything so I ran up to Mr PATTEMORE and tried to explain to him, 'You've got to help us, please help us?' But he didn't do nothing. I got chained to my bed all night for that. Us girls continued to shower together.

22. Mr POUNDER would make me go in his car with him instead of catching the bus to school. He only did this to me. I hated it, not going on the bus with everyone else. I ran to Mr PATTEMORE and complained, 'Why is it everybody else is allowed to go in the bus and not me? I'm frightened of this bloke. He's already perving at us, you know, opening the door and standing there

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watching us, thinking we're not using soap – rubbish! You need to help me. I am not going in his car to the school.' Mr PATTEMORE did nothing.

23. When I was in the car I would sit in the front passenger seat. Mr POUNDER would try to put his hand on my leg in a sexual way. He would say, 'Look, it's alright.' And I would say, 'Stop! Don't touch me.' Anyway, he would touch me and because I was right near the side of this door, I remember getting up on my feet and sitting up right over the side as far away from him as I could get. He would touch me every time I got in the car to go to school. When I think back about that, I think I was lucky that I used to not give in because I wonder if he would have maybe taken me to a side street somewhere and done something. He just made me sick. I don't know if he did it to any of the other girls.

24. A family of four came to Retta Dixon and lived in my cottage. There was a little girl named Sandy, Cathy and Barry WARDLE. They were from Wave Hill, my country, but I didn't know that. They spoke their own language and couldn't speak English. They were so frightened and scared, they cried all the time. Me and the other kids used to try to comfort them and we would get into trouble. The first time we all sat at the table Mr POUNDER put Sandy in a high chair right next to him. She shook and trembled and cried. I said, 'You need to get her out of there, she doesn't know what that chair is about'. He said, 'One more word and you will go to your room.' I said, 'I don't care if I go to my room.' My punishment for that was to spend the next week cleaning around the edge of the skirting boards with a toothbrush for being a smart-arse.

25. Mr POUNDER kept feeding Sandy – he would hold her nose and shove the food down. This kid wasn't used to eating cabbage and cauliflower and she'd be coughing and food would be coming out her nose. I knew I would get in trouble but I couldn't help it. I stood up and said, 'You're so cruel' and he said, 'Right, you're starting a riot here'. He put me in a spare room, he chained me

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up and he took my clothes off me and said, 'That's what Aboriginal people deserve.' I was so scared.

26. Sandy didn't want Mr or Mrs POUNDER to bath her. She'd scream for us. I said, 'What are you doing to her? Why?' Mr POUNDER said, 'Right you can go back in' and he chained me up in my room again.

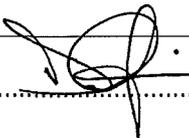
27. Another time Sandy was being fed again at the table and she was coughing and crying. I saw her eyes and that was it for me. I ran up to Mr PATTEMORE and said, 'You are so cruel. You can't see what that idiot's doing.' But again nothing happened. I had to run away. I later found out that Sandy died.

#### **Leaving Retta Dixon**

28. I was about 15 or 16 years old when I ran away from Retta Dixon to my mum's place in Darwin. I couldn't put up with it anymore. Sandy WARDLE being abused, Mr POUNDER trying to touch me when I was in his car, all of the physical and emotional abuse that was occurring, it just got to be too much. Someone came to mum's place twice looking for me and I said to mum, 'Please, please, please don't, I don't ever want to ever go back.' So when they came I hid in the cupboard or down the back in the long grass and they never came back after that. I'm not sure who it was that came looking for me because I stayed in hiding. That was the last time I was in an institution.

29. When I actually got out of Retta Dixon, mum already had three other kids and was living with a white man, my step-father. He was really nice. It was hard on mum when I turned up, and later on, Phyllis came and lived at mum's place too. There was never much money but at least we were together.

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30. When I left Retta Dixon I just walked away and because of that I didn't have any money or clothes. The hardest thing for my mum was to have to find us room, to have a bed and space for us. I had to share a bed with one of my sisters, but it was beautiful. I would rather that than anything.
31. I was in third year at High School when I went back to mum's place. I went back to school for about six months but mum couldn't afford to have us all at home and no money coming in, so I went and got a job at the supermarket in Darwin packing shelves. The supermarket was called 'Tom's The Cheaps' back then.
32. I remember one day Mr POUNDER came into the supermarket with his wife and kids. One of the kids was in a wheelchair. I went up to Mr POUNDER and spat at him and I said, 'What happened to him? I hope god punished you for what you did.' I know it was a bit cruel, but anyhow that's how I felt about him.

#### Life after Retta Dixon

33. Missionaries don't teach you life skills. They don't teach you about the outside world, they don't tell you about boyfriends, about being pregnant. Nearly all of us got pregnant when we were still very young, though not at Retta Dixon because we weren't even allowed to talk to boys. I never wanted that. There was no social security or dole back then and we thought if you had a child they would come and take it away because that is what happened to us.
34. I had four kids - Darren, Stephen, Carlene and Clinton. I had Darren when I was 19 years old. None of my kids were taken from me. The Department of Community Services (**DOCS**) never came near me. I still live with my son Stephen in Sydney.

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35. Eventually I went back to school. When I was in my forties I did a Certificate III in Community Services. I then got a job with Karu, an organisation started up by an Aboriginal to recruit and train Aboriginal carers for placement of Aboriginal children. Karu was under the control of DOCS, which is now known as Family and Community Services (FACS). At first I thought, 'Wow, this could be so good.'

36. I worked for Karu for 11 years. I started off doing placement of kids, but I am glad I was not placed in that kind of environment. Even when we placed children with families we had recruited, FACS were always looking over our shoulder, checking everything and making it very difficult. They never showed such interest when I was in Retta Dixon, and they never provided people for us to talk to.

#### Reporting the abuse

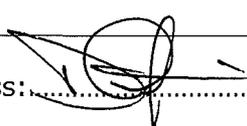
37. I never reported the abuse to anyone other than Mr PATTEMORE. There was no one else to report to. No one ever said, 'If you have issues, you come and see me'. We wouldn't have known what was acceptable anyway, there was no guide or standard to tell us what was allowed and what wasn't. I wouldn't have trusted the authorities even if they did speak to us because they were all white people.

#### Redress

38. I have never sought compensation. Retta Dixon was run by the missionaries and they don't have any money so what would be the point? I would be interested in compensation because what happened to me in Retta Dixon really affected my life. I see other cultural groups who arrive in Australia getting compensation and money from the Government and they didn't have to go through what I went through, but I got nothing.

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**Impact of the abuse**

39. I felt I had a good life because I could bounce back and be with my mum on weekends and sleep with her at night and hug her. I don't know where half of the people went when they left Retta Dixon. I had no money when I left and no clothes, nothing.

40. I am a strong person, I'm lucky. My brothers found it difficult when they had problems with their relationships. They thought they could just walk away even when they had kids, because that's what they think you're allowed to do. I still have a strong connection with my brothers and sisters.

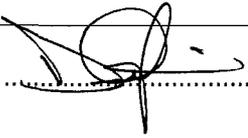
41. The worst part of it was that being in Retta Dixon left me without hope. I would have been interested in playing the piano, in having a career as a typist, or as an Air Hostess. I got offered a job by Trans Australia Airlines as an Air Hostess but didn't take it. My sisters and I also got offered modelling jobs but we just didn't have the self-confidence to do anything like that. That was the worst, missing out on so many opportunities in life because Retta Dixon just gave us no hope, no life skills and no self-confidence to do anything.

**Desired outcomes from the Royal Commission**

42. If anything comes out of this Royal Commission, I would like to see the kids that are in care have somebody they can talk to - somebody that they trust come and talk to them. Too many of the caseworkers don't care enough about the kids and what is right for them, but just go about doing their jobs. Sometimes, they are just the wrong people for the job. Aboriginal people, they can be the worst sometimes because they've got too much hurt from what has happened in the past, particularly those like me who were taken from their families. Using kinship carers can be a good idea but you need to keep an eye on it and you need to find the right ones.

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43. Something else I don't understand is why didn't the government call my mum in and say, 'Look we can see that you've been coming to visit your kids for many years and you're stable. Your kids can go home?' There is a strong view with families, Aboriginal families in particular, that you can never do anything to get your kids back. Families need to know that if they work hard they can get their kids back.

Signed: Sandra Kitching

Date: 25-8-2014

Witness: D. LATIMORE 

Date: 25/8/2014

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