

Alecia Buchanan

REDACTED

19 March 2014

David Burgess

Director, Satyananda Yoga Academy Ltd

300 Mangrove Creek Rd, MANGROVE CREEK NSW 2250

Re: Satyananda Ashram, Mangrove Creek NSW 2250

Dear Mr Burgess,

As you are no doubt aware, the message posted on the 'Satyananda Yoga Mangrove' social media (Facebook) page by the administrator on 27th February 2014 in response to 'Reviews' by children and adults who lived there in the 70's and 80's has generated substantive online comment, some of it from individuals and their families directly affected by the abusive and exploitative behaviour of previous Ashram leaders. The focus of many of these comments is the perceived response, or lack thereof until now, of Satyananda Ashram as an institution.

Some people have also received private messages via social media from one of the newly appointed Satyananda Yoga Academy committee members, namely Yogasandhan.

I write this letter on behalf of and in agreement with a significant number of people who were either Satyananda initiates, permanent residents of Satyananda Ashram(s) both in Australia and abroad and/or children of the above.

It is agreed that the current administration's recent apology for the abuse and misconduct of this charitable institution in the past on the Ashram's social network page is a step in the

right direction. It is the very first ever private or public acknowledgement (to those affected) by Satyananda Ashram as an entity that any harm ever happened to children in this institution's care, as well as their families and others dedicated to building Satyananda Ashram in form and reputation.

However, the nature of social media is highly transient; older messages lose prominence and Satyananda Ashram's message and invitation to post on their site has 'fallen', is no longer immediately visible, and thus cannot be said to be a truly permanent, public, significant, meaningful and genuine acknowledgement from Satyananda Ashram to survivors of its past wrongs.

Both myself and my mother have received a personal message through social media from a representative of the Ashram's administration. Despite being almost carbon copies of letters received by others (close associates who have trusted me enough to share their personal messages) it is nonetheless one of the most significant positive actions the Ashram has made toward me in 25 years. However it is only an electronic message and was reactive on the part of the administration in an attempt to respond in a timely manner to recent social media posts.

We and our families will not attend Satyananda Ashram's 40th anniversary nor the Thursday, April 17th 2014 afternoon healing mantra with fire ceremony. While a healing mantra with fire ceremony and memorial for those who suffered past abuse may work for the current administration as a way to openly acknowledge and heal/ deal with the past, it doesn't resonate or work for us on a number of levels. The event appears to be a rushed late addition to a previously arranged 40th anniversary. It is planned at a time when most people will not have arrived for the celebrations over the Easter long weekend. It is not planned for a public holiday meaning it is not truly accessible, and there is little preparation time for those who may need to attend from interstate or overseas. There is also an apparent lack of presence by the figurehead of the organisation, Swami Niranjanananda, to lead a public and open acknowledgement in addressing past wrongs.

Unfortunately for all current and past associates, devotees, teachers and students of Satyananda Ashram, openness and honesty about the institution's past from the perspective of the current administration isn't being as broadly embraced as it should be. This is even more pertinent when one considers how many individuals are still closely affiliated with Satyananda Ashram who were present during the 1980's in particular, when crimes against the Ashram's children were being published by the Australian media and processed in Australian courts of law.

Does Satyananda Ashram, its various organisational structures or its parent organisation plan on delivering to survivors of its past anything beyond social media posts, ceremonial activities or offers to contact committee members? Because for any apology on behalf of Satyananda Ashram to be genuine and meaningful we believe it should address the needs of the people who gave so much of themselves, their dedication, their labour, their savings and their love during this period in the Ashram's history, not merely satisfy an administrative burden to be seen to be doing the right thing. More carefully considered acts of restitution are required before we can believe that Satyananda Ashram has genuinely apologised and is seeking to make amends, and before healing and forgiveness can begin.

Regards,

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Alecia Buchanan (*Previously known as Swami Shantibodhananda Saraswati*)

On behalf of a concerned group of Satyananda initiates and former residents of Satyananda Ashram Mangrove Mountain, and their families.