

**SUBMISSION FROM MATTHEW STUART IN RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPER10
– ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT AND THERAPEUTIC TREATMENT SERVICES –
ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE**

I am a “survivor” of child sexual abuse and have attended my Private Session with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. I want to make a submission to discuss some of the issues that are important to me and that I feel strongly about.

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I started to seek help and was referred to NCASA in 2011 and felt that I would only get better if I did a series of things including medical help, counselling and approaching the School to seek some kind of justice. I appointed a Lawyer who was a specialist in this area and the School was very prompt to reply and through an "Alternative Dispute Resolution Process" I received some compensation and an apology. This was before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

As I mentioned in my last submissions I thought I needed to do a number of things to address and get over this thing that has impacted so significantly on my life and try to "get better". I could not go on as I was. For me these were:

- Getting medical help from anywhere I could (psychological care, counselling)
- Addressing the matter with the School (seeking compensation and an apology)

The final report from the Royal Commission on Redress and Civil Litigation released on 31 August 2015 says that appropriate redress for survivors should include the elements of:

- a. direct personal response
- b. counselling and psychological care
- c. monetary payments

It is great to see all these recommendations in this report and I do hope that some of them are eventually implemented. However, for me the process has been difficult, lengthy, lonely and traumatic as I have done most of it by myself and opened myself up to further frustration, trauma. I often wonder if the Royal Commission will really result in making things easier for "historic victims". There is a frustration and anger for the time justice has taken and even when it is felt that justice has been done is it too late to make a difference - what does it change after so long when people say the same things that they did when it happened "Forget about it and just get on with your life". It feels like you are almost starting your life again but do we need to hope and wait that some recognition of "historic victims" needs will be taken on board at all or be made available to victims within a time period that will actually be of assistance before we are too old, worn out and too affected to be considered worthwhile helping in a meaningful way.

Through the process of receiving assistance from health services I have been told "Life is unfair", "Just forget about it, put it behind you, move on with your life", "Our priority is recent victims" amongst other things by support services. It's not very helpful!

I am a bit confused about this issues paper and what it seeks to achieve given that Counselling was addressed as part of the "Redress and Civil Litigation" consultation paper and report. This is probably because anything outside Counselling has not been part of my experience and I was not aware of it if it exists at the moment. In this Issues Paper (10) Counselling appears to be included in "Therapeutic treatment".

Therapeutic treatment:

I discussed my experience and opinions on "Counselling and psychological care" as part of my "Redress and Civil Litigation" submission and include this below:

"Counselling and psychological care: As mentioned above I believe this is the most important issue of all. Without this any apology or monetary payment is of little value or assistance to the victims if they continue to live with severe

psychological problems. My experience with counselling and psychological care has not been good and I have struggled even with the Royal Commission to get anything near the help required. My sessions with NCASA (Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault) were very helpful but I was only entitled to 10 sessions – then it's over and you are left seeking out and paying for appropriate help yourself which is very difficult, daunting and expensive. I did read in the consultation paper the view that people who have been abused are the responsibility of our entire society. In my case it was the reaction of "society" (teachers, school, local and wider community, parents, relatives,) that hurt me the most. It is a hard pill for society to swallow but the reality for me is that society did the most damage to me (obviously it stemmed from the perpetrator and the abuse itself). It seems that the body is stronger than the mind and this is the aspect of child sexual abuse that really needs to be concentrated on the most. Who knows what psychological care will cost or how long it will take. My hope is that resources are made available and that help is not limited or made difficult to obtain. It should be recognised that for victims who have suffered for years and have not received any or very little adequate help that help may be required for the rest of our lives as behaviour and coping mechanisms have become entrenched over the many years since the sexual abuse. It is my view that if the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse does nothing else than get victims the best professional psychological help possible – paid for by society – they will have done the best they can."

Unfortunately, I have lost faith in the general health system to deal with this issue. My experiences have been negative. In addition to the comments mentioned above from health services I was once, after expressing my hope to initially try to overcome and work through my problems without medication I was told - "We can't help you if you don't want to cooperate and take medication". Medication was all that was suggested in the 1/2 hour consultation.

I found my sessions with NCASA (Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault) helpful as mentioned above and I felt comfortable there as it was obvious that they understood the issues surrounding sexual assault for adult survivors. I thought that after all these years someone finally understands and is willing to spend some time with me talking about the many issues that I had not been able to discuss with others. The person I was seeing was obviously committed to his profession and this specialist area. I was happy that I had found some constructive help but also angry that it had taken so long to find appropriate help.

I feel that my experience with Counselling help through the Royal Commission was not so useful in contrast. I am left with the firm belief that the first point of call for "historic victims" needs to be a specialist in this area who is part of an organisation dealing with adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

If you are an abuse victim you don't need to be accessed by a GP or anyone to find out if you have been abused and want help. Counsellors seem to be the appropriate first contact for "historic victims" as they spend time with victims and give confidence to victims to proceed to other services. At the moment other services are difficult to access. I have not proceeded any further to date. Where are all these other services

and how do you find them? It seems like the system is only set up to deal with crisis situations - when something like a suicide attempt or violence occurs. For me, someone who has since the abuse happened turned my anger inwards and suffered in relative silence are a low priority to the health system. I became an expert at hiding my depression by moving on, avoidance and living a limited and isolated life.

Therapeutic treatment including all the trained practitioners mentioned in the issues paper - would be very helpful for victims. I had hoped that the Counselling provided through the Royal Commission would be linked in to these other trained professionals but my experience has been that it is not and it has been disappointing that Counselling alone has been offered. It is particularly surprising when the Royal Commission is to go on for a long period of time and many victims will be waiting and hoping help in other areas following on from the Counselling will be available one day.

Advocacy and support:

Having had no experience with this my main thought is that I wish did! It would have been very helpful in the process I have supported myself through:

- Getting medical help from anywhere I could (psychological care, counselling)
- Addressing the matter with the School (seeking compensation and an apology)

I would like to understand where this type of support is available from if it is available at the moment. Perhaps it would be a useful starting point in the Royal Commissions work on this issue to clearly identify and outline where services in both "Advocacy and support" and "Therapeutic treatment" stand at the moment so that "historic victims" can get access to them if they exist. I would imagine it is the starting point anyway in any meaningful inquiry into these issues.

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I hope that the victims who have come forward can get easily get access to appropriate "Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Services" before the Royal Commission is over and that none of them experience the difficulties I have had.

I hope I have answered some consultation questions you have asked through this experience based submission. I am currently seeking appropriate Counselling to discuss the issues raised from speaking publically telling my story. These experiences can be bitter/sweet.

Matthew Stuart