

The Hon Nicola Roxon MP
Attorney-General

Monday, November 26 - 2012

SAMSN submission on Terms of Reference

Survivors & Mates Support Network was formed in 2010 by three men who suffered abuse during their childhood and adolescence. We believe recovery is possible, even decades after the abuse occurred, and welcome the establishment of a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In keeping with our intention to provide quality support and safety, SAMSN employs qualified psychologists and social workers experienced in working with male survivors. Mark Griffiths, a psychologist with over 20 years of experience working with both male and female survivors, is our primary consultant psychologist. Mark ran successful recovery groups for men at the Sexual Assault Service at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for over a decade.

To date SAMSN has successfully delivered four eight-week psychologist-led peer support groups for male survivors and one half-day workshop for male survivors and their supporters. We have given comment in the media about the issues commonly faced by male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. We are not affiliated to any church or government service.

As the government prepares its terms of reference for the Royal Commission, our primary concern goes to the welfare of victims and their ability to give evidence in a safe and supportive environment. We believe that the Government's first consideration should be to ensure that a clear structure of support is established so that victims feel safe and supported throughout the life of the Royal Commission and beyond should they require it. The Royal Commission's duty-of-care to victims must extend to victim support agencies and the co-ordination of a network of support for victims in each state. Funding must be made available to reputable organisations so that quality assured care can be made available to survivors, their families and their supporters.

We make these recommendations in the light of the current lack of affordable support and treatment options for adult survivors of childhood trauma. This gap in support services is reflected both in services specifically targeting the needs of survivors as well as the inability of existing services, particularly mental health services to address the needs of childhood trauma survivors.

The following page outlines, in point form, our thoughts and recommendations for the Terms of Reference.

Kind regards,

Craig Hughes-Cashmore & Shane McNamara



Scope of Inquiry

- The subject of the Commission should be limited to sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence.
- The focus of the Commission should be abuse in and by religious institutions, state organisations such as schools, sporting organisations and other non-government organisations.
- Survivors of abuse and their families and supporters must be allowed to give evidence in a non-threatening environment and anonymously if they wish.
- The Commission must contain a well-resourced investigative arm to review institutional responses and failures and to consider the criminal culpability of individuals and organisations.
- The Commission must consider reforms to the criminal justice system to ensure that victims of abuse are not disadvantaged and re-traumatised through the adversarial criminal trial process.
- The Commission must investigate legal barriers affecting the ability of victims to seek redress including the establishment of a national non-adversarial system for compensation.
- The Commission should make recommendations regarding the access of adult survivors of childhood trauma to appropriate affordable support services approved by a national accreditation system.
- The Commission must identify effective ways for adults and organisations to protect children from abuse in the future and ensure their implementation.

Structure and process of the Commission

- The Commission must liaise with victim support organisations to ensure quality support is available to victims, their families and their supporters in the form of counselling and legal advice.
- We recommend the appointment of a Commissioner with overall responsibility for the running of the Commission assisted by Assistant Commissioners - one in each State and Territory.
- The Commissioners must have a broad range of relevant experience in psychology, child protection and law and include at least one Commissioner(s) who is Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal.

Timetable for Reporting

- There should be no arbitrary final report date for the Commission.
- There must be clearly established interim reporting dates to allow for recommendations on any legal or other changes considered necessary or appropriate by the Commission.

