

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Ballarat — 28 February 2013

#### Members

Mrs A. Coote

Ms G. Crozier

Ms B. Halfpenny

Mr F. McGuire

Mr D. O'Brien

Mr N. Wakeling

Chair: Ms G. Crozier

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#### Witnesses

Ms J. Courtin,

Mr P. Blenkiron,

Mr K. Whelan,

Mr S. Woods,

Mrs A. Murray,

Mr A. Collins,

Mr T. Lane,

Mr R. Walsh, and

Mr P. Tatchell.

**The CHAIR** — Good morning everyone. Thank you for being with us this morning. We are pleased to be back in Ballarat for a second day of hearings within this area of Victoria. We have a very important program today so we might commence with proceedings, but before we do so I will just run through a number of housekeeping rules for members of the gallery and the media.

In accordance with the guidelines of the hearings, I remind members of the public gallery that they cannot participate in any way in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the Family and Community Development Committee secretariat are to approach committee members. Members of the media are also requested to observe the media guidelines. Can you all please ensure that your mobile phones are now switched off whilst you in the gallery. On behalf of the committee, I welcome Ms Judy Curtin.

**Ms COURTIN** — Courtin.

**The CHAIR** — Courtin, I beg your pardon Judy, Ms Judy Courtin, on behalf of a number of people here this morning. We welcome you all and thank you for all being here. I am going to speak to you as a group, so this will pertain to you all, if that is okay.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. Witnesses may be asked to return at a later date to give further evidence. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Please note that these proceedings are not being broadcast.

Following the presentation the committee members will ask questions relating to the inquiry. I will call on Ms Courtin now to start the presentation and then other members will come and speak at the table after you have finished. I understand that you will introduce those members as they come up.

**Ms COURTIN** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much again for being before us. We look forward to hearing from you.

**Ms COURTIN** — Thank you very much and good morning. I was invited by the contributors and supporters of this group submission to speak today at what is now the second historic day for the people of Ballarat. It is historic because evidence is being given for the very first time of the hideous sex crimes committed by Catholic clergy against young children in this city and region.

Firstly, I want to say that I feel honoured to have worked with this extraordinary group of survivors — those of you who are here today and those who could not be here. I have learnt a lot from all of you, and I thank you for that. Secondly, on behalf of this group I want to thank the committee and all those behind the scenes for their hard work and commitment in trying to right the shocking wrongs of the past, but also the wrongs of the present — the ongoing secondary abuse and trauma experienced by the survivors in trying to deal with the church hierarchical system that puts itself first.

The wrongs of the present also include the multiple legal barriers for survivors and victims in finding justice, and the abuse and trauma suffered as a result of survivors going through the church's internal complaints processes, Melbourne Response and Towards Healing. The impact of these crimes are lifelong, multigenerational and far-reaching. They go well beyond the individuals and their loved ones. They go deep to within this community.

I also want to thank the committee in advance, or in anticipation, for taking these matters seriously and bringing about recommendations that effect real change, that bring about real justice — that long overdue justice that these people and this community have an entitlement to.

The content of the group submission has been compiled from the stories of 12 survivors, or victims, and the information has not been separated out and attached to any one particular survivor. Rather, it has been consolidated so as to create one generic document. The remaining 32 survivors — so we have a total of 44 signatories to the submission — who were unable to speak about their experiences and/or unable to put together a submission of their own have either given their support or added their names to the submission, as they fully support its content, which also reflects their experiences.

The men who did speak about their experiences and contributed to this group submission have endured subsequent stress and trauma, and they would like the committee to know and to appreciate the strength and energy it takes to put together a submission for this inquiry. The fact that there is an inquiry into the crimes and the cover-up of the Catholic Church means an enormous amount to these men and their families. A lot hangs on the outcome of this inquiry.

I will now talk about the evidence in a summarised form from the group submission. I will then look briefly at the impact of the crimes and the major recommendations from the group. Following that I want to talk about the suicides and the premature deaths of the people in this community who were raped and/or sexually assaulted as children by priests and Christian Brothers.

Last year when I was assisting the group to put this submission together, I was shocked to hear of the brutal and sadistic criminal physical assaults inflicted on these people as children, as little kids, by Christian Brothers and priests. I think generally such physical assaults have been underreported to this inquiry, and as such I think they deserve special attention.

In September last year I wrote a piece for *The Conversation* pointing out the extent and the severity of these physical assaults. These children were in primary school and early secondary school, and I talked about a culture of fear. I wrote:

It seems the sex abuse was but one element of a school environment and culture that formed an amalgam of physical assault, torture, sexual assault and rape, all accompanied by constant fear, terror, confusion and bewilderment.

But where do the physical and sexual assaults begin and end? Were the physical assaults an insidious precursor to the sexual assaults? One man at this meeting told of being bashed and reduced to tears, comforted and then raped. Sadly, this was a recurring sequence of events.

I said at the end of the article, 'The parliamentary committee needs this information'. Here we are five months later and you now have it.

With the physical assaults, the ages of the children ranged between 5 years of age and 16 years of age, and some examples of these physical assaults were bashing and punching with closed fists to many parts of the body, but the head, the neck and the buttocks were preferred. They were bashed with hard objects, including a wheel brace. They were picked up and moved around by the ears. Some boys were choked. Others had their head pushed down the toilet and forced to stay there until the toilet finished flushing. There was hitting on the head, the face and other parts of the body with a ballpein hammer. One victim has had his facial bones fractured as a result. There was whipping with a cat-o'-nine-tails, a fanbelt and something called a gat — which is a thick wide piece of rubber — across the buttocks, the back, the legs, the arms and the hands. They were beaten across the bare knuckles with the side of either a metal or timber ruler, often until there was bleeding.

Some boys were locked up in a very small storage room, more like a cupboard. One victim was punished by being sent to, or being put into a mental asylum for two weeks because he tried to tell people about the sex crimes and he would try and fight off the offender. Victims were forced to watch other boys being beaten and bashed. They were whacked on the buttocks with a T square, which had screws protruding from it. Some boys were violently thrown up against a brick wall, others were thrown through doors. The victims described much of this treatment as torture.

Victims reported that if they were physically bashed and assaulted but not sexually assaulted, there was a sense of relief as the fear of a sexual assault following the physical assaults was so great. They describe themselves as being frozen with fear.

The sexual assaults and the rapes consisted of penile oral rape of the child, penile anal rape of the child, digital anal rape of the child, forced masturbation by the child of the offender, masturbation of the child by the offender, and fondling of genitalia both through and under clothing. The age range of these children at the time was between 5 years of age and 14 years of age.

In relation to the impacts of the physical and sexual assaults, I will outline the general area of people's lives that have been impacted and give some examples of those impacts. A bit later on, some of the contributors to this submission will give evidence about the impacts on their own lives.

The general impacts on their health include things like depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, attempted suicide, suicidal thoughts and tendencies, aggression and anger and violent tendencies, negative impacts on their own sexuality, lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem, fear, dread and fear of damnation or going to hell.

Impacts on family are also extremely significant and this speaks to the multigenerational effects of these crimes. There are difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships; the lack of trust; inability to show affection, which has a marked impact on their children and their partners; constant reminders of the childhood assaults, especially when the victims and survivors have their own children and/or are around nieces and nephews or children of friends.

The impacts on education include an inability to learn at school due to fear and terror and development of literacy problems due to early inability to concentrate or to study. All victims felt that they could 'never better themselves', and there are lifelong effects from being told 'You are worthless, you will never come to anything'.

There are impacts that cause problems of alcohol abuse, problems with drug abuse and many have been in trouble with the police. Looking at careers and employment, the majority of the victims or survivors have only been able to work for themselves, some cannot work at all. One victim ended up by belting his bosses because of the problem with authority figures. All experienced a terrible loss of confidence in their work lives and a feeling of being worthless because of their inability to work.

I am going to now read out the major recommendations for the group and then I wish to speak to the suicides and premature deaths. This group highly or strongly recommends: no. 1 that survivors receive lump-sum damages for pain and suffering; no. 2 for this committee to make an interim finding that a scheme be put in place as soon as possible to set up a church-related fund or a CRI.

This will help survivors now and the survivors' needs and victims such as ongoing counselling or therapy, ongoing medical and other treatment, housing and other daily living expenses such as cars, utility bills, food, clothing, travel, insurance, and so on, and also opportunities for further education and training should all be addressed with the CRI. This CRI, this scheme, should be run by the state and funded entirely by the Catholic Church. The survivors wanted me to say that it is noted that all the needs of the clergy offenders, including their holidays and their legal fees for criminal trials or prosecutions are all fully met by the Catholic Church.

The third recommendation is that the deeds of release that were signed by the survivors as part of their compensation payments be retracted, such that they will be able to sue either the Catholic Church or the religious order involved. But in order for that to be able to happen, the fourth recommendation is that there be legislative reform of the Catholic Church property trust acts to enable survivors to sue the church. Basically all signatories and all supporters of this group's submission, whether identified or not, want justice.

I would like to conclude by talking about the suicides and premature deaths. Tragically the people of this community know all too well of the totally unacceptable number of suicides and premature deaths relating to the decades of Catholic clergy sex crimes in this region of Ballarat. Detective Sergeant Kevin Carson from Ballarat police worked tirelessly over a period of about 10 years gathering evidence in relation to the heinous crimes of Robert Best and Gerald Ridsdale. During those investigations Detective Carson inadvertently came across the names of well over 40 people in this region of Ballarat who had killed themselves or died prematurely due to alcohol and drug abuse. Tragically the suicides do not stop in the region of Ballarat. There are clusters of suicides in multiple parishes and schools across this state and these suicides follow the trails of many Catholic clergy offenders as they were moved by the hierarchy from parish to parish.

It is hard to believe that there has been so much loss, so much tragedy in one small area here in the Ballarat region. So many beautiful, smart, caring, sensitive and amazing young men and women were driven to this point of utter despair, and they were driven to this point of utter despair following the despicable sex crimes of Catholic clergy paedophiles and the subsequent protection of those paedophiles by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. And so there is blood on the hands of those responsible for the original sex crimes, and those responsible for their subsequent concealment or cover up. This is an outrage and still, in 2013, other than some of the individual paedophiles who have been convicted, there has not been one person — not one — who has been held criminally accountable for the decades of protecting paedophiles and moving them from parish to

parish, or interstate, or out of the country, thus allowing even more children to be raped and assaulted, and even more deaths. This has to stop.

Many survivors today continue to battle with suicide. Enough is enough. These brave and courageous people, these people of integrity and stoicism, must be given the support they need and the support they deserve. This is not negotiable and they must be given it soon. There are to be no more deaths. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Ms Courtin, for, on behalf of the group, providing that overview. I understand that Mr Blenkiron is coming to the table. Is that correct?

**Ms COURTIN** — Yes, I would like to introduce Peter Blenkiron.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Blenkiron. When you are ready, please commence.

**Mr BLENKIRON** — First of all I would like to say that I am a very grateful man. I would like to say thank you, just before I start, to my functional family, which has stood behind me, especially my wife Clare; to Judy; to my fellow survivors behind me and the ones over there who do not want to be on camera — and that is okay — the ones who could not make it today and the ones who have been a big part of this but who are still in bed today because they just cannot do it; to Kevin, down the back, for his tireless work in putting these rapists in jail; to the Ballarat community, including some clergy; to Ingrid for her work on the logistics of getting this all put together; and to the committee.

Without all that support I would be dead. I hit a day when I decided that my family was better off without me. I got through it because of something my wife said — that my kids would be better off and she was grateful that I was going to counselling and working through this stuff and the kids would have an example of a father who worked through difficult times rather than giving up. I am grateful to be here. I turned the corner about 18 months ago. I am no longer suicidal; I do not battle that ongoing voice or volume. If you have not had to battle it, it is pretty hard to understand. It is like a stereo going in your head, saying, ‘You’re no good; you’re worthless. What’s the point?’ Sometimes that volume is at 1, other times it is at 5 and other times it is at 10. The more support you have, the better your counsellor, the more the volume goes down. The more you are alone, isolated and left to listen to those thoughts, the more at risk you are. I was convinced that everybody was better off without me.

Anyway, that brings me to where I am today. There must be no more deaths. I understand from living it. Even when I was in the middle of it I did not fully understand how you get to that point, but the reality is you do. I was lucky I had some resources to support me through that and I had the people I just mentioned. If I had not had those resources and I had spent every day trying to just pay my rent and pay for food, trying to work because I am too proud to go and line up for the dole and have to tell the story of why being abused as a child causes you to be unable to think — I was lucky I had some resources, like I said, and I could get through to where I am today. Most of the survivors today haven’t got any resources. There is no pathway forward from that.

I am a bit like a broken record. I keep coming back to the same point because it is the point of action. The truth of the past is coming forward. I am sure you guys are sitting there hearing these stories over and over — probably to the point where you have to disassociate from it. You would have to, otherwise you would not be able to get up in the morning and do your job. You would have to. The community has to go, ‘Not more church bashing! I am sick of this; it is too much’. But the reality is that if we don’t put something in place to stop the deaths, when the inquiries are finished, this one and the next one, the bubble of hope that has been created around this will burst and there will be an escalation in suicides, they will go through the roof. There will be more deaths, unless we have a concrete outcome for the survivors plus the community.

A big part of the Ballarat church community has been contacting me and saying, ‘What can we do? We are sick of the non-action. What can we do?’. They have formed a group and they are saying, ‘Righto, we will divert our church funds to survivor packs’. This has happened already. There are five or six survivor packs, sending some money to people who could not pay rent over Christmas. People have had enough. Healing does not have to take place just for us survivors; it has to take place in the community as well. Unless we can put something in place, run by the government and paid for by the church or the responsible religious body, then the healing will not happen.

We need positive action. The question I am asked is, 'Who is going to pay for this?'. One of the practical solutions would be for the church's tax-free status to be stopped and a CRI tax introduced that then funds the CRI card run by the government.

George Pell actually had a good idea. He put a system in place, but the way he did it was not quite right. People who did not understand it tried to run it. There were five sessions of counselling, and they said, 'Sign on the dotted line, take the money, go and have a binge and destroy yourself. You can't come back and talk to us about it anymore'.

Post-traumatic stress disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder do not go away. This is proven in history. That is why our government has a TPI card in place to support war veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder. They need to be supported through this so they can live and hopefully heal. I am a bit of a broken record on this, but the way forward is through action. Look at Ireland — 10 years of talk and no concrete results. We want a concrete result. We do not want the bubble of hope to burst; we want that energy to go into something that is going to be real, a pathway for people to slot into and live.

I had a lot of other things to say, but really it comes down to that. For me, that is the action. Talk is cheap. We need an interim finding for action, the same as there was for the bushfires. After Black Saturday 65 recommendations were made, one of which was to put overhead powerlines underground so that no more fires would start and there would be no more deaths. They did it straight away. That was done by the royal commission. You guys need to do it at a state level. A recommendation needs to be put to the royal commission as well. Let us lock this part of it down so people can get on with living and there are no more deaths, no more suicides. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Mr Blenkiron, for that overview and your insights and thoughts on this matter. If you would like to return to your seat, thank you very much.

**Ms COURTIN** — I would like to introduce Keith Whelan.

**Mr WHELAN** — All right, thank you.

**The CHAIR** — When you are ready, Mr Whelan.

**Mr WHELAN** — Yes, I am. My thing is, if I don't steamroll this I will not get through. First of all, in some way I feel as if I am a lucky one. Thanks for the opportunity.

Reporting the abuse. Segments of that very day in 1972 when I was digitally raped by a Christian brother — while attending form 1 at St Thomas More College, Nunawading are still so very real to me to this day. The cologne or similar worn by the abuser remains a trigger from wherever it finds me. The bicycle ride home with a big hill did not beat me. Most vivid for me was running outside to play footy and the back door slamming after I had told my mother what had happened to me that day in the school classroom. He taught me subjects such as religion, English, geography and mathematics and went with the title of form master. I was only asking for help when he took advantage of me and stole my soul in a brutal act.

I believed that I was listened to, because soon after I was travelling to a new school by train. With my parents being strict Catholics, I was certainly frightened about getting my mouth washed out with disinfectant if I had said something wrong. That did not happen. At my new school, in the same year, a teacher approached me from behind only to find me holding him off with a broom. I believe now that his intentions were good, but unknowingly I had changed. The change that I talk of is the lie that evolves in which you, me, live in so your peers do not know your weaknesses — and of course that means the braver you have to be, which meant the more trouble I was in.

Somehow through persistence from friends, 25 years later, in 1997, these troubles and no care for authority led me to doing a police statement about my abuser. Sadly, I did not get the result I was looking for. My abuser was in jail, but he did not remember me — so I was told. The answer hurt more. With my anger still raging and the alcohol turned off, I penned a letter in 2004 to the church. I decided to show my parents the letter before I posted it. It was also a way of making sure I was brave enough to post it. So after 32 years the incident was spoken about again. It was to my disbelief that I had not been heard all those years ago. The change of school

was for academic reasons. Too bad; it was a lost opportunity, because I really needed something to do with my hands.

Mum and Dad were appalled by knowing they had given all their lives to the Catholic Church — their family, their trust, their money, their time and their support, broken by the Catholic Church. They supported my letter and encouraged me to persist. The response was quick, and the matter would go to the appropriate place, and that was the Towards Healing process. By 23 February 2005, the last thing I was fighting for was money.

Survival meant a lot of changes in me, and most would be barriers: a loss of emotional management, my sexual identity lost, commitment issues, emotionally absent from relationships and parenting, the knowledge that I have been a victim and a perpetrator — I live with this every day.

A letter dated 1971 from the principal about the rules in More college quotes article 19 — accepting the rules of the college and assisting in enforcing discipline. It was signed by my parents for enrolment. Was there a process in the prospectus that protected the students from paedophile teachers that the principal may or may not have known about? I coped by using cigarettes and coathanger wire hot off the gas stove to burn holes in my arms to control the pain. I was raped again after the brother incident, and fearing more sanctions against me, I never reported or spoke about it. When getting my prostate checked, I have to check that it is for medical reasons. Today I find that the Towards Healing process was more about the church being seen to be doing something and that it had minimal healing for me.

This comes under my wish list — and I am also very strong about what Peter has put forward for that. My wish list is: for the church to acknowledge that the abuse by the members was unacceptable and they will now care for those who have been abused by them and their system. Now, this really stinks, this bit. The church used coercion to get me to sign the deed of release. I wish to be released from that so I can now be adequately compensated.

The only thing that has kept me going has been my property, Baker Street. It's a place where my expressions are shown in the form of building and with an art form. I've not had a full-time job since a series of workplace accidents around 2000. I am currently doing a welding course with the hope of a ticket at the end, but I do not know if I can work with an employer, so I would like support and extra funds to create my own business. Like any other job it relies on funds and I would love to have enough to finish it, both the job and Baker Street. The need for mechanical help cries out as my ageing body manages to cope — anyhow! I will need ongoing medical and counselling support. For funds, let us start with what has been rumoured to have been spent by the Catholic Church defending this perpetrator and creep — \$400 000 plus. This would give me a great chance to support myself and be self-sufficient in my own home.

I'd like to thank you for that, and I would like to present this to the chairperson.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Whelan.

**Ms COURTIN** — Keith's sister, Doreen Clarke, could not be here today, and I have been asked to read this out on her behalf. It is in relation to the Towards Healing meeting that Doreen went to with Keith to support him. She writes:

Keith and I both spoke to the panel. A representative of the church then told us that this person was already in jail — the offender —

and that there was no need for further action to be taken. In retrospect this advice further protected the offender and failed to provide impartial information which may have offered Keith another form of redress.

Keith was told that he could be compensated, they provided him with a sum, he was then told to accept or reject ... Keith rejected their pitiful first offer and negotiations continued until Keith felt he would need to accept what was to be their final offer.

The irony for me was that this compensation process took the majority of the session with little emphasis on an apology or ensuring that Keith would fare well into the future. I came away feeling insulted and humiliated by the process and seriously questioned the impact this had on my brother. The disclosure by Keith to the panel afforded him little in feeling good about himself and being appropriately compensated for the trauma that has and will continue to plague his life.

The process offered no restorative function either to Keith as the boy or —

Keith as —

the adult. The hearing on that day did nothing to restore Keith's sense of self-worth, his faith, or mine, in the Catholic Church with its system of cover-ups, seccies, protection of wealth and abusive members on innocent children.

I hope also that the royal commission can address many of these injustices not just for my brother and our family but for all involved.

And that was from Doreen Clarke, who was Keith Whelan's sister.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Ms Courtin, and thank you, Mr Whelan, for your presentation.

**Ms COURTIN** — I would like to now introduce Stephen Woods.

**Mr WOODS** — Good morning; my name is Stephen Woods. Between the ages of 11 and 14 I was repeatedly bashed, molested and raped by three Catholic clergy who were friends of the family and that the family had trusted. I was not the only one in my family that this happened to. I am the youngest of seven children, and the youngest three were also molested, bashed and raped.

The person I want to speak about now first is Pat Harris. In 1953 he was repeatedly beaten into submission and masturbated by the principal of St Paul's Technical College in Lydiard Street, here in Ballarat. Pat was 13 years old. He knew of others also being bashed and molested at the school. If your name was called out over the PA for lunch, you knew what was happening. That was their method of operation. If it was not called out, he said, you gave a sigh of relief; it was not going to happen to you today.

This goes to show that in 1953 beatings, molestations and rapes were happening in Ballarat. It shows that these sex crimes were not happening over years; they were not happening over decades; they were happening over generations. Pat is the oldest victim to come forward that we know about. He is in hospital at the moment, and he is very ill, partly due to stress and anxiety, but partly due to injuries to his body. He is just outraged that this has gone on, not only since he was at school but clearly it happened before him and undoubtedly it would have happened ever since the church and the Christian Brothers came to Ballarat.

One of the paedophiles who molested me was Brother Edward Dowlan. His lawyers — when I had charges against him along with 22 other victims at the time — harassed victims by hiring private detectives to call up the victims and to ask us whether we wanted to continue with the charges, and if we were sure we felt up to the court case et cetera. These private detectives were harassing victims, until they got to me. I told them where to go; I told them what to do with their lives; I told them if they came to see me, I would get my father's chainsaw and I would fucking teach them a lesson they would never forget.

I merely rang up Sergeant Blair Smith, who was the police informant in that case, and he stopped them. This is what happens when you go against an organisation such as the church. They harass you. Harassment by the church's lawyers is normal. In one of the courts I had to go to, the judge stopped the proceedings and he told the QC to speak to me in a respectful and professional manner. This was the guy who was receiving close to \$6000 a day, and he had been Brother Best's lawyer for years and years. He and I had met previously, and yet he was treating me so badly in court that the judge had to stop proceedings and instruct him to speak to me correctly. That is one of the ways that they harass you.

Another way is being treated as if you are the perpetrator. The questions they ask, the way that they put questions, was to make you feel that you were the perpetrator; just like the way that women years ago complained about the way that they were made to feel that they were the ones who had instigated the rape against them. That is the way that we victims feel in court, being harassed by these obscenely paid for lawyers.

The church, in defending Brother Edward Dowlan, over the years that he was in court, they spent close to, or, as it was said to me, they would not have got any change from \$500 000, because he was their first golden boy to go into court. But even worse than that is Brother Robert Best. I was told by an informed person of the court that the Christian Brothers have spent — are you sitting down? — \$1.5 million defending this heinous sex criminal. This is the one also who has a litany of bodies after him — \$1.5 million they have spent so far. Thankfully, he is in jail now.



With the idea of the CRI card coming up, one thing that the church will say, the brothers will say and organisations will say is that, 'We can't afford it'. That is just bullshit, clearly, with so much money being spent just on these two guys — two of the paedophiles who molested me. They have spent \$2 million. The funny thing is, they have never said where the money comes from, and to this day they still refuse to say where the money has come from.

I say to you quite clearly that they can afford it, and that is what should be done immediately. The instigation of the CRI is now up to you. It needs to be done. Thank you.

**Ms COURTIN** — I would like to introduce Anne Murray, who is Stephen Woods's sister.

**Mrs MURRAY** — I am just a little nervous.

**The CHAIR** — Just take your time.

**Mrs MURRAY** — I am Stephen's older sister and the only girl in a family with six boys. I saw the effect of the abuse on three of my younger brothers. We did not know about it at the time. It was not until 25 years or so later that we discovered that all the dysfunctional behaviours that were happening with the younger members of the family were due to this abuse. But predominantly I come here today to speak on behalf of my brother, Anthony — that is Stephen's older brother — and my other brother, Martin, who is still alive. Anthony was a beautiful, creative, musical boy who lost his life; he died when he was 33 from AIDS directly as a result, I think, from his abuse. Anthony, when he was 13 years of age, went on a school camp to Lightning Ridge where he was asked to go into the tent of Father Ridsdale, and he was raped repeatedly all night and subsequently when he came back to Ballarat, by Ridsdale, although we never heard the details of this because, I think, at the time when you hear it, it is such a shock you cannot ask, 'Tell me more, tell me more details', but his behaviour, his pain, his trauma was evident in his lifestyle.

Anthony was an exceptionally gifted musician, and I suppose I had a particular rapport with Anthony — and I can feel the pain now; you think it is gone, but it is still there, 30 years or whatever after his death. It is always just under the surface. Like it is with anyone who has lost someone or who has experienced a sibling's or whoever's pain, you wear it, and it is just under the surface. It affects your behaviour; it affects your life. You move on; you manage.

**The CHAIR** — Excuse me, Mrs Murray. Stephen, would you like to sit up at the table? Sorry to interrupt you. Please continue.

**Mrs MURRAY** — Sorry, I have never spoken at one of these inquiries before. You do not realise how much is in there until you are given the opportunity to talk.

**The CHAIR** — I am sorry to interrupt you, but please take your time.

**Mrs MURRAY** — Anthony told us about four years before he died, when he was riddled with AIDS, that it was because he had a mentor in Ridsdale, and in the abuse his sexuality was so confusing to him. He may have been homosexual; we do not know. He married, had a child, but that was all destroyed because of his confused sexuality. The ongoing play in the mind, I think, of abuse victims, that is the trauma that goes on, is going on in the mind. It is not a one-up counselling session; it needs immense counselling.

When Anthony told Mum when he came home from the camp, I think on that night, that he did not want to go on a camp anymore because Father Ridsdale made him sleep in the tent, and Mum's reaction was, 'Oh, that's lovely darling. Wasn't that kind of him to comfort you?'. And I think from that moment on, it was probably a profound moment, Anthony knew that there was not an understanding and not even a beginning of an understanding of the horror that went on in that tent and how it changes someone's mind, and how the culture at that time could not possibly see that this was going on.

I suppose I partly came to talk about mum and dad's trauma too. Mum never really got over the fact that she felt that she did not protect Anthony, that she did not respond at the time. And that was her deepest hurt. And of course being a mother myself, and also being a teacher of 35 years, it is unbelievable that people that you look after and protect — you feel you have not done your job. Our eldest brother, Michael, received a very disturbing audiotape from Anthony in 1976, when Michael was overseas. It was a collection of lines from songs

explaining his deep hurt. I suppose Anthony was around about 18 years at the time; I am not sure. I do not know the details, but the pain and his life played out in an absolute mess of searching for peace of mind.

Anthony's confusion and sadness made him vulnerable to a religious sect, where they tried to cure his homosexuality. Ultimately the attempts to change his sexuality were futile, and he left his marriage and he was a lost soul. Before he died he confided to us a lot of his pain about the abuse.

I would like to also speak on behalf of Martin, another brother, a third brother, who was sexually molested and viciously beaten consistently over a period of three years by Brother Best when he taught him in grade 6 at St Alipius in Ballarat and subsequently, in years 7 and 8, at St Paul's, when he moved on. Martin was a different personality. He was a strong personality. He resisted sexual penetration, from what Martin can tell us. But once again, Martin's shame and probably manly reaction to it was to slide over, I suppose, the details of the abuse. But he was beaten, and it was the vicious — he said 'the violent' — beatings: the hitting, the thumping, the hit with what they called the gat, which was a really thick strap. He copped more and more beatings as he was defiant. He was a different personality to Anthony, and it plays out differently in different personalities. Martin had a psychiatric assessment done at about the time the abuse became known; around about 1995, I think it was. He was assessed as being more psychologically disturbed and traumatised than Vietnam veterans. He still has the report.

I suppose because I was the only daughter with six brothers I was mum's confidant. Often Mum could not talk to Dad because Dad was of that generation where, you know, if you cannot deal with the problem now, she knew that it was too traumatic for him to process. So I was the confidant. Once again, we did not know at the time but Dad sensed an enormous amount of disturbance amongst the three younger boys as they were growing up. Dad developed hypertension and distress, feeling like he had not protected his children. If he had been given a chance, I think he would have killed them. If it was put in his hands, it would have been difficult to control himself when he found out. I think a lot of parents would be in the same boat, and probably society would be grateful to see someone get their hands on these paedophiles who made this decision to destroy young children's lives. Dad's spirituality declined as he saw the vicious beatings and the effect that the behaviour of the clergy had on his children. Mum developed polymyalgia, an autoimmune deficiency disease, as a response to the stress.

I just cannot understand how you can have someone like a Ridsdale not only as a clergy but in the leadership in clergy. I just cannot understand how someone could not see this happening. I cannot understand how people have not seen that the Catholic Church is complicit in the perpetuation of thousands of criminal acts against children under their care. One of the things I would like to say is that I think the church should be forced to become a legal entity. It should be able to be sued over abuses by people in its employ. As it is, the institution of the church is under no real threat — it is just a real inconvenience that they have had to suffer this — and therefore I do not think they will change. I do not know and I do not understand the processes involved, the legal processes involved, but if the royal commission has any power in being able to make the church a legal entity, I would say, 'Go for it. Hit them where it really hurts'. Because it is probably not until it hits the purse strings that they will take action.

I would also like to just make a comment that I think that the Catholic Church needs to move into the 21st century and become a more modern institution, where women are in power. I know there are a lot of women involved in church, and of course there are a lot of wonderful women in the church. I, myself, had a wonderful Catholic upbringing, and I had a wonderful secondary school experience. But I think the homophobic reactions to sexuality and the church, and particularly men in its ranks, is just archaic.

I would like to finally finish up with that I do not think an institution, an educational institution — any institution that is dealing with young people — should ever recruit people who are psychosexually immature, which so many were. An uncle of mine was 14 when he was recruited to be a Christian brother. What does that do to one's sexuality? How do they deal with their own sexuality? I think I have said it all. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Mrs Murray, for your presentation.

**Mr COLLINS** — I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I have made my own private submission, which covers the facts of my abuse. Like the others, I want to talk about the impacts on my life.

While I am talking, I would appreciate if you could keep in mind that that is the boy who was abused. It is very easy to look at me and say, 'That's a man sitting there talking to us', but that is the boy who was abused.

I was abused at age 14 at St Patrick's College in Ballarat by a Christian brother. I was brought up in a very devout Catholic family and had great respect for the church and its clergy, who were seen and believed by us all to be closer to God. The Christian brother who abused me was not only my teacher, an authority figure and a man of God, but he reminded me very much of my father, who I had been very close to. At the start of the year he was very kind and very nice to me; by the end of the year he was a sadistic brute. My reporting of the abuse was not believed by any of the adults who I told, and nothing was done about it. This was not only a betrayal of trust, but it left me in fear. I was all alone, and I had to face this fear by myself.

I changed a lot that year. One of my fears was that I would be labelled as a homosexual. If the Christian brother made advances and abused me, was I gay? Did he know something I didn't? I wanted to make sure that everybody knew that I wasn't gay and that I wasn't weak, so I adopted a tough persona. Fighting became a regular occurrence. I played a lot of sport, and I played hard. For the rest of the year, I made sure that he knew that I was tough. I swore, I played up in his class and I was in a lot of trouble that year. I indulged in some risky activities like shoplifting, and I was in fear all year. After the abuse, he would stand and watch me in the showers after sport, even though he had nothing to do with coaching or being in that sport. There was just constant fear. I had to endure being taught sex education by him as well that year, which was horrendous. I think it is fair to say that my childhood ended that year.

I was later approached to become a Christian brother by both the Redemptorists and the Christian Brothers. I still have booklets and leaflets at home that they gave me. My mother would have been very proud, and I honestly say that I briefly contemplated this to please her, but there was just no way it was going to happen.

I had to develop a coping strategy, and the best analogy I can use is that of a beach ball. I held the beach ball under the water. It is easy to do, but after a while your arms get tired and it becomes hard to do. As life goes on, you have to use one arm to deal with something else and it becomes harder again. Eventually the beach ball flies up out of the water, and once it is up you cannot get it back down again.

I discovered that, if I was occupied constantly, I did not have time to think. At school I played a lot of sport. When I started work, I studied after hours or had two jobs. Later, while I was in business, I started other businesses and later became very involved in politics. I was always busy, and I was described by others as a workaholic. I had the mindset that I could do anything I set my mind to, and I did. Nothing was too hard. There were complex business negotiations, planning, public speaking — all that sort of stuff. My dream at that time was to follow a political direction and, if all had gone well, I would have been sitting on the other side, where you people are.

I have always been emotionally numb. My feelings have always felt fake, and I have never really understood them.

I have always been aware of what happened in the abuse, but I thought that I had it under control and that it wasn't a problem for me. I have read that trauma can resurface by being triggered by problems emerging or other significant life events. The media reporting of my abuser being charged and sent to prison, the media reporting of the Ridsdale and Best cases, followed by some business problems, and then the decision of my son going to secondary school, were all catalysts for me. I had nightmares about my son being abused as he got to around the same age.

I hit rock bottom. Severe depression set in. It has been reported that the average time between abuse and reporting the abuse is 25 years, and that roughly fits in with me. The day I went to the police station and reported the case was one of the hardest days of my life. I was that 14-year-old child again. I had a fear of disclosing what happened to me to others. Would they think I was gay, weak or a liar? Would I become a social outcast? There was my family to deal with — what they would think — the shame that I felt and what I call the Catholic guilt because you cannot speak ill of the church.

In some ways I was correct. Most of my family I have lost. I have lost a lot of relatives and friends who just don't want to know. I have a guilt that I have a lost soul, that heaven is gone for me. Although I have many new friends and they are very supportive, many others just do not want to know and do not call anymore. I didn't do anything wrong, but I feel punished. I have definitely lost my faith, and I believe I have lost my soul.

There have been many links shown between child sexual abuse and mental health, and I tick all the boxes — major depression, post-traumatic stress, social anxiety, relationship issues, insomnia, excessive ruminations and worry. I have spent time in a psychiatric hospital, I take medications and I have attempted to take my life multiple times. I have been to countless psychiatrists and mental health professionals, and I have a stack of reports that say I will never be able to work again or, if I do, it will only be part time and something of a repetitive nature.

My brain just does not work most days. I can have a day where things are good, and that can be followed by three or four days where I struggle. I cannot get out of bed. It can be a nightmare just to do something as simple as reading a newspaper. I have reached a point in my life where I cannot see any more hope. I have no dreams or goals; they are just gone. It is like my future just broke off and fell into an abyss.

I deal with it by waking up in the morning and putting on a mask, because I have three children and a wife who need me to be normal. At first the mask worked all the time, but now I wear my mask with a hopeless kind of exhaustion, and deep inside I really just don't care anymore. Some days I do not have the energy to even put the mask on, and I question why I am still here. There are times when I honestly feel that I would be better off not being here.

Although I have been emotionally numb before, there are many times I get overwhelmed by emotions. I am very glad that my wife has stuck by me, because I have seen many other victims whose partners find it too hard. I love my wife and children — they are my entire life — but I feel I am a burden to them. In my heart I just don't understand how they could be proud of me, and I feel a failure. I have failed myself; I have failed my family. My head tells me it is not my fault, but my heart just tells me I have failed. Who do I blame? I blame the person who abused me, and I blame those who moved him around when they knew.

In the submission that was made to you by Broken Rites, they list details about my abuser and that his abuse was known, and he was moved around by the church. I have met lots of good people in the church, but all it takes for evil to flourish is for good people to do nothing.

This inquiry cannot change what has happened to me or other victims in the past. You can make changes to make sure that it never happens to anyone else again. Please don't let the victims continue without support. Like the others, I am calling for the introduction of a clergy-related illness scheme. I understand that there can be arguments as to whether it is a state issue or a federal issue, but I would really ask you to take the leadership on this and to just get it in place. For the sake of our families and those who support us, we need to be here, and I am just glad that I can give voice to those who are not strong enough to stand up and for those who have unfortunately taken their lives. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Mr Collins.

**Ms COURTIN** — I would like to introduce Tim Lane.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Lane, when you are ready.

**Mr LANE** — I would like to start off by reading my statement. My name is Tim Lane. My first memories of Grant Ross were in the 1970s when he first came to our home. I was about four years old. I recall a time when I was inappropriately touched by him and have clear memories of what he did to me. I was sitting on his knee in my lounge room watching TV. The lights were off, so the only light was being emitted from the TV. I remember him fondling my genitals while I was watching TV. He had his hands down my pyjamas, but I remember being enthralled by what was on TV.

I also remember walking into my bedroom on another night, and he was leaning over my brother John's bed. He heard me coming in as the door was ajar, and he said, 'Go out for a minute. I am just saying, "Good night", to John'. I can still see the look on John's face. I did not know what that look meant back then, but as I am older and wiser now I know what that look was for. It was a look of fear and embarrassment, and now I know he did not want me to leave the room — John didn't — that was because this scumbag targeted us one by one, never together — the six children in my family: three girls, three boys.

Years later my brother took his life at only 19 years old. The law apparently states that because this filth died before we came forward, we cannot expose his name — which I have already just said — because he cannot

defend himself. What about when I was four? Could I defend myself? Where are my rights? This man had more protection than a four-year-old kid. Before this monster came along, I had good images in my head, doing what kids do — catching lizards, playing, kids thoughts, which are pure, fun and innocent — only to be replaced by filthy images of an evil scumbag that I have not been able to erase from my mind.

That photograph is of my brother, asleep in death. That is the last image I can remember now. When I kissed him, he was cold. That is what I remember. Pain and loss about dear brother John will never be replaced, not by any amount of money, sorries, counselling or consoling. I want his name to be brought forward, so people know what he did to us. Of the other kids in the family, I am the only one. I am the youngest of six, and I came forward after the older brother came one night and lined us up in the passageway and said, 'Has he been touching any of you others?', because he himself was. We all agreed, 'Yes, he's touched me'. 'He's touched me'. So we came out and they pushed me forward and said, 'You tell them, Tim'. I was only five, and here I am again today to finish it. I am here again coming forward.

As for the Catholic Church, they will never be a brother or a father to me. I will never use that title, because He is Our Father, and He has seen everything. Anyone that is blood guilty with him will have to face that consequence, probably not too far off with the way the world is going. We have all noticed it is such a wonderful place at the moment, and the \$30 000 gold crosses — pure gold — that the Pope wears while he blesses starving kids. I am pretty sure they can compensate people for what they are asking for, but what I mainly want is his name. 'Pray for him' is on his plaque. Pray for what: that he died sorry? He never approached me later in life and apologised. As I said, they are no father. They are no brother, and that title should be ripped from them too.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you Mr Lane.

**Ms COURTIN** — Rob Walsh.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Walsh, when you are ready.

**Mr WALSH** — My name is Robert Walsh. I come from Ballarat East. I was baptised and christened at St Alipius church. I went to St Alipius kindergarten as a child. In grade 6 I became an altar boy. I was sexually abused by Gerald Ridsdale. I was raped by him. I was also sexually abused by Christian Brother Robert Best. I have convictions against both of those men.

I have three suicides in my family. I know of more suicides. I have swum with George Pell in the Eureka Stockade swimming pool. My family is large, and I was the second generation to attend St Alipius.

I can honestly say that a situation has to be put in place and has to be taken ahead by the government to end the suicides, to end the pain and suffering and the continuous battles that we have to face every day — that me and Anthony faced yesterday — to get recognition of the trauma and the suffering that is ongoing.

There is an article here I wish to show you — 'Bishop tells people confidentiality clauses should be disregarded'. Here was a day when he just sort of thought to himself, 'Well, that's okay then. We'll just ditch all that'. Payments from St Alipius to victims — the limited investigation has concluded — have not equated to \$1 million. When I was in court with Best the barrister was getting \$10 000 a day. He earned more in one week than one payment that has been made to one of the victims of Best. Forty thousand dollars to a victim of child abuse — a rape victim — is half a year's wages, and that is the system they have got at the moment. I am asking the committee to tell the Catholic Church to shove their pamphlet and get on with the real game — the real business — of healing this community. Thank you.

**Ms COURTIN** — I introduce Paul Tatchell

**Mr TACHELL** — I suppose I have been extremely fortunate as a person. I am extremely fortunate because the people who sit behind me have had to suffer and endure completely different circumstances than me for the same crime. It is very hard to explain the difference where people have been repressed by this problem, but if I can give you a background. In the very early 70s I was sent to boarding school. I did not know I was going there. It was in Ballarat. Fortunate or not, I had an understanding. I was probably a little bit older, probably a little wiser and maybe as a 13-year-old physically more advanced, so I understood from the first

night in the dormitory what was going on. Having been exposed to violence early in my life and understanding violence in a very raw form, it seemed to be that the best form of defence would be offence.

For my year at St Pat's, rather than go to the small room on the corner where other boys went, I took the fight to the brother and preferred the damage. It seemed smarter. Unfortunately it did not work out that way in the end. Eventually you get put in a position you cannot get out of, and you are locked in the room. There are things that even as an old man today I am embarrassed about. I was raped by a bloke. It is an incredibly humiliating thing. But the fortunate part about it was that after it happened I found an opportunity to get him back and show him how angry I was and how angry I was going to be. I had my day in court. I told him what I thought of him, and I told him what I thought of the things he did. I had written down everything he had done for that year. I had written down every person he had been with, because I knew one day we would be here and somebody would ask the question.

As it turned out, that act, or what I did, did not work out quite as I had planned. When I went to tell the authorities within the boarding school, 'I'm leaving, and I'm leaving tonight, and we've got to sort a few of these problems out', they locked me up, which was not quite what I was after. But my parents came down the next morning — they were good Catholic people. The church spun it and said it was my fault and that I had a violent reputation. Inevitably I was in for psychiatric analysis. Subsequently it was proven there was nothing wrong with me other than that I get angry from time to time when people do the wrong thing. I was subsequently put into another boarding school, and during this period I was never allowed home on my holidays. I lived with these people. But the difference was that I was a year older and a year larger, and I was also the Antichrist. If I saw what was going to happen, I was going to stop it. Rather than go through the process of trying to make people believe you, maybe it was time we made the people who were doing the wrong things understand exactly what they were doing. That ended in tears too, I have to tell you.

I had a Christian brother there who was fornicating with pigs. These were people who were teaching young people who lived in this place. He was fornicating with pigs. I took him to task, and I made him sit with the pigs. Another man who was just recently jailed had a young boy in the laundry bent over the equipment. I took the kid out of the place, and I finished that bloke off and told him what I thought of him, as a boy.

Inevitably Ted Dowlan came back with another school to play football there. He got another taste of being a demon. And then from that point on all of a sudden your life changes because you cross a path you should not. You are not old enough to be making these decisions. You are not judge and executioner. Inevitably people turn on you, and you become the Antichrist. Your family ostracise you, so it becomes the case that you have to go and educate yourself, and you do those things. I did, and I was extremely fortunate. I was fortunate that I had the inner ability to do those things. Maybe it was that little bit of age. Maybe I had seen the worst. When you see the worst of things, you can only look for better things, so you try to find a better way.

I went away with the army. They educated me. I was only 15 when I went in there, but I was educated. I came out and went into business. I have been very successful and happy, and I have a fantastic family. I own a newspaper — I am a writer — and in the early 90s I wrote a story that I probably did not want people to know. You get known in the community, you are embarrassed about things still. I wrote the story, and I saw that people actually supported it. People said, 'Maybe we need to do more'. Then a guy named Blair Smith came to see me. He was a copper trying to unravel the mess. He said to me, 'I've got a guy up on charges'. I said, 'Yeah, I know who he is'. He said, 'Can you help us out?'. I said, 'I've got the diaries. I've got the notes. I can tell you everything that happened'.

I spent 12 months with Blair, where we worked our way through different case files, looked at different things, spoke to Christian Brothers, spoke to priests, trying to find a resolution, trying to find a way where this could stop — and this is 20 years ago. Finally, Dowlan went to jail — and it was not about jail. The victory on that day in court was about somebody actually taking responsibility for what had happened. Somebody actually made the brave move to go against the tide and do something different — that is, to do the thing that makes it very difficult. We go through our lives and every now and then you just got to stand up and say, 'Yes, shit it hurts, but you know, at the end of the day, what is more important? The future is'. I had my day in court in 1974. I got my justice. I got it the next year and the year after, because every time I saw that injustice I had the opportunity to do something about it. That is what you guys have got today. You have got an opportunity.

The difference is that they are broken men. We have all seen broken women, and we all cry. If you see a broken man, it is a little bit deeper than that. Call it sexist if you like, but when a man breaks, he breaks in a big way, and he does not always come back together in the same pieces. For the last 20 years I have worked with people who understand this, worked with people at a very raw level — that is, victims, survivors, and I am one. but I have just been lucky.

A guy rang me one day when I was in my office and he said, 'I'm out in the whipsticks, I've got a gun, and I've got my oldest son with me. What are you going to do?' I said, 'I'm on my way.' He was going to kill his son — so his son would not have to hear about what happened to him — and then kill himself. It seemed to me that we were pushing the cart from the wrong end. I got the gun off the bloke, and we sent the boy away to protect the boy. But ultimately the man needed help, and the biggest thing that a man struggles with when he needs help is to get over that thing that we grow up with. Anyone who was born in the 50s or 60s has grown up to understand that you have to be the man of the house, you have to be the strength, you have to be the one that keeps it all together. So when you fail, the system fails.

Here we are today, and maybe we are a little bit more cosmopolitan today. Maybe people are a little bit more prone to tell the truth, and maybe people do not take on that humiliation. Maybe that is the first step to try to repair the damage, because this is not about the Catholic church; this is about the sales reps and then the sales manager. It is an organisation. There are decent people in the Catholic Church, there are decent Catholics. There are people today in Ballarat who have chosen a different path. They say, 'Instead of defending the walls, let's build a bridge, because that's far more important'. All we need to do now is find the people who hold the key to the golden gate to repair some of the damage.

I am repaired. I do not need money. I have emotional issues — don't worry about that. Anyone who has been raped, if you think you are just going to smile and get over it and say, 'Oh well, you know, hand on each shoulder, finger up your arse, you'll be all right' — I tell you that it does not work that way. I do not cuddle my kids. They are old now; the oldest one is in his 30s, and I do not go near them. I have never kissed one of my children, because there is something in me that says the day you do that, you break down. You are no longer the strength, because you need to have that strength to go on. I have got it. I have survived, and not only for me but for other people — these people behind me.

Every time I see a broken man I think there is one more fight we have got to have, and there are plenty of them; and there are plenty of them who are not coming out. If I go back to that diary in 1974 and look through those names, there are a lot of men that we do not see within this group. There are a lot of men who have not come for justice. And how many of them are still with us? Because they cannot get over it. So it is up to all of us; the people who have come here today, the people who sit behind me who have made incredibly tough decisions, especially in a country town. It is a different world. It is a bit different to living in Fitzroy. You live in a country town, everybody knows what happened. I am a councillor. You reckon by tomorrow morning there is not going to be people looking at me sideways? It will not worry me. I have never backed off from a fight in my life, and I am not going to back off from this one.

I really thank you people for listening to me. I am a different case scenario, but it is still the same. It is still a massive problem. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Mr Tatchell. Are you happy to take a couple of questions?

**Ms COURTIN** — Certainly.

**The CHAIR** — Just you, Ms Courtin, or Mr Blenkiron as well?

**Ms COURTIN** — Whoever wants to answer the questions.

**The CHAIR** — Before we turn to questions, I thank you all very much for the presentations you have given to us this morning and for your collective support. If you are not comfortable in taking a question, that is absolutely fine as well.

**Mr McGUIRE** — Thank you — and individually, Judy, Peter, Keith, Stephen, Anne, Andrew, Tim, Rob and Paul — for the strength and fortitude you have had in bearing witness today; that is very important for us to

hear. Also for all the supporters, I think your role is critical. We can get to the depth of this issue and the complications it has raised and then look at what are the remedies, so thank you very much for that.

You have gone right across a range of issues today. I would like to address two issues, if I could. One is just to try to explain to the general public and people who may not be aware of just how this wounds your sense of self. So many people today have brought photographs of when they were schoolboys and what happened. Peter, before we go to the issues of remedies, if you could sum up that sense of feeling again, if you could just put that on the record for us. This is something that you carry like a shadow, isn't it?

**Mr BLENKIRON** — When the abuse happened, when I was 11, I froze. Not only did I freeze on the spot, I froze emotionally. It was only three or four years into counselling that I started to actually feel an emotion in my body from that day forward. I thought emotion was a thing you did in your head. I got a sense of it. When I had a normal emotional upheaval in my life in 2000, it was the straw that broke the camel's back. The ability to hold that emotional trauma inside and any other emotion that I experienced since 11, it all snowballed up inside. So not only did I experience the initial trauma but every single emotion I had held back from 11. So when the straw broke the camel's back it was an absolute avalanche of terrible emotions experienced all at once. It knocked me into oblivion. I was in my house for probably two years. I would only go out to go to cricket or cricket training. I tried to hold my coping strategies together, or I would go out and obliterate the emotion with drink. And I would do anything I could to get away from those feelings. That is what I was doing subconsciously, because the feelings are still all there.

It is like Andrew said with the beach ball. That beach ball is that emotional horror that eventually gets bigger and bigger and you cannot hold it back. It goes off like a bomb, and it destroys your ability to think. It shuts down your brain, and that has been proven chemically. I have been told by therapists that that is what happens. Your body actually has a chemical reaction in the brain. Then what happens is you try to learn to function.

In my experience, with the help of a very good counsellor, I started to maintain my coping strategies, to guide myself down and to ground myself. It is like a little rowboat caught in the ocean in a storm: you are getting thrown around by every wave and that wave is all of a sudden a load of emotion. You have to try to get yourself into a port, throw some landlines out, have some coping strategies, maintain the coping strategies and eventually take the lid off the rowboat, experience a little bit of the storm at a time and start to try to function in small bits and, with the help of the counsellor, go into that emotion and process it. That itself gets worse before it gets better. That is why the sense of hope does not get better straightaway. The sense of hope gets worse; it gets darker and gets darker.

I had to go on medication to keep together. I had to exercise three times a week, do meditation, do martial art, do yoga: I do yoga nidra three times a week. I play music. I have a massage once a week and acupuncture. I use every strategy I can and that has been a process. I fell apart in 2000, remember, so I have been trying to maintain myself for 13 years. Even for the first six years I still did not equate it back to the abuse. I just thought, 'I'm just struggling here. I'm depressed. It can't be that'. You have to remember the first stage of the healing process is denial — denial to yourself.

One day my wife said to me, 'You've done a two-year back-to-work program. You've gone from 10 hours of work, of sweeping the floor, to 20 and you still can't use your brain. Something's not right. Did anything happen to you? Is there anything you never dealt with?'. I said, 'No. I always dealt with everything. I don't know what it is'. I thought I had a brain tumour, that my brain had something growing in there. It felt like two rocks pressing all the time. The more I tried to think, the tighter and more intense the pain got.

I said, 'Except what happened when I was 11, but that didn't affect me'. She said, 'Speak to a counsellor. Cross it off your list'. I spoke to Terry Ranger at Centacare, who took the contact reports with Towards Healing back in those days, 2006. I told the story for the first time. I rolled into the foetal position and I started to dry-retch. He got me a bucket and I pushed him away and I managed to hold back the contents of my stomach. From then on I chose to try to work through it, because the alternative for me was unacceptable. Then when the kids came along, I thought, 'Well, actually, you know what? It's not all about me. They're going to be better off without me'. That is when what happened before happened.

Now I am triggered all the time. The lead-up to this was horrendous because I was abused in Dowlan's room because I had not completed my homework and got something wrong, so the fear of getting something wrong is



a trigger. Leading up to this — because I helped to organise a fair bit of this — to get something wrong, it triggers my stomach: my stomach wants to heave up, I get tightness around the chest, my throat closes over. I tried to put a tie on this morning because the guys who are with me said, ‘We’ll wear a tie’. I tried to put a tie on. Normally I could wear a tie if I am going out with friends or doing something, no worries. But it triggered that because we had to wear ties at school. I felt my throat close over; I could not breathe. I had to take the tie off and I threw it to one side.

So there are all these things that happen inside your body, the emotional body of an 11-year-old that is trying to get older and trying to learn and understand how to deal with itself. I am emotionally stuck back in time. I am trying to grow up emotionally and it takes time. I am catching up. My wife said a couple of years ago that she guessed I had almost hit 19 in my emotional self. I do not know what she would say I was now — probably 20. I do not know the names of what goes on in my body. I feel it now. I do not know what is what. I know anger is down the bottom, but I have no idea what the rest is. There is a benefit to this. I can start to feel enjoyment now, too. That had long gone. I would only ever feel the ranges: sexual anger, sexual depression. Sorry; it is a longwinded answer.

**Mr McGuire** — Thank you. I will hand over to other people to ask questions, but if I could say just one other thing. The evidence is clear before this investigation that it was not the children’s fault. I will just say that. The evidence is there; it is on the public record. It is clear-cut.

**The Chair** — I am going to ask Mrs Coote to ask one last question.

**Mrs Coote** — Peter, Keith, Stephen, Anne, Andrew, Tim, Rob and Paul, the stories that you have given us today and the courage that you have had to be here with us today are just extraordinary. I personally want to thank each and every one of you. Judy, in bringing together the collective, has also shown enormous courage. But it has been a very, very powerful submission from all of you.

I know that many of you have asked for a clergy-related injuries fund and for a special organisation to be set up. I know that you, Judy, said that we should be taking this seriously. I can assure you that we are taking it seriously. You have said that a lot hangs on the outcomes of this inquiry, and we are extremely mindful of that. We have heard also from people who have said that they do not want to have anything from the Catholic Church. They do not want to have any money; they do not want to have anything at all.

So I ask, probably Peter: can you think of something that should be helping those people? If there is not a church-related injury card or system set up for them, have you been able to think of something that might work for others who do not want anything to do with the church’s money?

**Mr Blenkiron** — Yes, I have thought about that.

**Mrs Coote** — Can I just say also that I think you look really trendy without a tie.

**Mr Blenkiron** — Thanks. Feel free to take your ties off! I must say that when they did the testing, they said my intelligence was still all intact, but I had damaged the pathways to the outside world and within, so I used to be on broadband and now I am on dial up.

**Mrs Coote** — I am still using a typewriter.

**Mr Blenkiron** — I do not think we need to reinvent the wheel. We can look at what systems work elsewhere. I keep going back to the TPI; it is a model. They have a gold card and a white card. The white card is for people who are still functional and just need some help with some of the injuries related to what happened in the conflicts they were in. The gold card is for when they are so damaged that it affects their whole life. So all their medical expenses are covered, they get some help with some rental assistance and they get a fortnightly allowance. It is a safety net.

I know a guy who is on it who came back from the Gulf War. He was suicidal for years. He got it. He said, ‘It’s a safety net’. He has gone back. He has done a course for carpentry. He works when he can. He might be able to do a day a week, some weeks. Some days he gets out of bed and he has a friend that he rings up and says, ‘Can I come and help?’. He will do a day’s work, perhaps two, but then he will spend the rest of the week in bed. But he keeps trying; and when he falls, there is a safety net. If he becomes fully functional again, there is no

problem; he can just start earning his own money. But if he falls again in three months time, the safety net drops back in.

Anybody who is still functional does not want anything. First of all, this is something set up by the government. It cannot be from the church; the government has to run it. Yes, they will source the funding to run it from the organisation responsible. You have to remember that we all have the authority figure trigger going on inside us, so we need to trust the body that runs it. The government has to be the organisation.

I look at Energy Safe Victoria. It might seem like I am drawing a long bow here, but Energy Safe Victoria deals with electricity and gas, and they kill people if they are mismanaged. If religion is mismanaged, we know what happens. Energy Safe Victoria is an independent body that manages the production right to the end and makes sure that the whole thing is watched.

When we get this CRI in place, it will not just watch and help the survivors. Eventually we will all get old and live our lives — full lives — and Clergy Safe Victoria will become a body that makes sure this does not happen again in 5 or 10 generations time. As Paul Tatchell said, the sales reps out there are human. Unfortunately this stuff can still happen, so we need to create a watchdog for future generations, which will not need CRIs or help to live, but will make sure there is an independent watchdog. Let us face it, there is an independent watchdog for everything — TAC, WorkCover. I bet in your job somebody is watching what you are doing right now. You will be assessed. You have KPIs to meet. Everybody here is being watched, except if you are part of the church or religious organisations. They are the only ones who watch themselves.

Like I said before, there are some great people and great clergy — Kevin Dillon, Paddy Mugavin up the back, Barry Ryan, Kathleen Moran and Rita Hayes. There are ones here who are calling for action. So I think you just put it on two levels. Some people might need a bit of help with their counselling.

**Mrs COOTE** — You have given us a really good set of examples, so thank you very much indeed. I really appreciate it.

**The CHAIR** — On behalf of the committee, I thank you all very much. You have heard from Mr McGuire and Mrs Coote, who have thanked you, and I know that other members of the committee would also like to thank you and show their appreciation for your coming before us collectively, for your submission and for the presentations you have given to us this morning. They have been very helpful, and they are much appreciated.

**Witnesses withdrew.**