

**Submission  
No 90**

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT METHODS AND IMPACTS OF  
CULTS AND ORGANISED FRINGE GROUPS**

**Name:** Bev Cox

**Name:** Laura McConnell

**Date Received:** 6 July 2025

## **Coversheet**

**Submission to: Inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups**

Submitted on behalf of Survivors of Truth 2x2s in Victoria by Bev Cox and Laura McConnell

Permission granted for this submission to be made public

# **Submission to: Inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups**

**Submitted by: Survivors of Truth 2x2s in Victoria Australia**

**Date: 04 July 2025**

## **The Truth / 2x2's / Two by Twos/ Church without a Name**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 A Hidden History**

Many followers of the Truth, or "2x2" group, are unaware of the group's true origins.

Those who are aware often share an alternative narrative: that Jesus founded the group, it remained dormant for centuries and then was revived by William Irvine following a message from God.

In reality, William Irvine started the movement in the late 1890s, after he broke away from a Scottish faith mission. He began his own group in Ireland, instructing followers to go out in pairs and hold gospel meetings in tents. They were expected to give up all personal possessions and live a modest, itinerant lifestyle. A key tenet of their beliefs was drawn from Matthew 10, which emphasises preaching without material support.

The origins of the group have been thoroughly researched and documented by author Cherie Kropp-Ehrig in her book, *Preserving the Truth*, published in 2022.

Around 1910, Irvine's followers began spreading the movement internationally, including to Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada.

#### **1.2 Early Days**

In its early days, the group was described as a simple, home-based Christian sect. However, tensions arose in the early 1900s, leading to the excommunication of William Irvine. He was effectively sent into exile in Jerusalem. After this, the remaining leadership made a deliberate decision to erase his legacy. As a result, many people raised in the faith grew up knowing nothing about Irvine, instead believing the group directly descended from Jesus' original disciples.

#### **1.3 Beliefs and Theology of the Truth/2x2 Group**

The beliefs and theology of the Truth/2x2 group can be difficult to define and often vary slightly by region, as areas are individually managed. This means beliefs, customs, and interpretations of the Bible can differ based on region, state, family, and

community. Despite this, the group claims its teachings and people are the same all over the world. Despite its secrecy, it is a very interconnected and organised international network that operates using cash donations and home-based meetings.

In a nutshell, the 2x2's believe they follow the only true path to God. They teach that all other religions or beliefs are false or misguided, and that only those who live according to their way of faith will enter heaven. Everyone else, regardless of belief or good works, is believed to be lost.

Central to their structure are missionaries, known within the group as *Workers*. These Workers travel in same-sex pairs, remain celibate, and dedicate their lives to preaching. Their mission is to convert new followers and to keep current members from straying. This method is seen as following the example of Jesus, who they believe sent his disciples out in two by two (hence the nickname 2x2's).

The group rejects community buildings or churches, seeing them as worldly or unbiblical. Instead, they gather for worship in members' homes or occasionally rent public spaces. Their services, referred to as *Meetings*, are simple and solemn, with an emphasis on spoken ministry, prayer, and hymn singing.

Sunday is considered their holy day, set aside for worship and fellowship. They hold a strong belief in the second coming of Jesus, when he will return to judge the world. Upon death, they believe each person will face God's judgement. Eternal destiny (heaven or hell) depends on how a person has lived and the choices they've made, especially regarding their acceptance of what is referred to as "the Way".

Note: Workers are supposed to be celibate, however are often secretly not compliant with this and are found to be sexual predators or having affairs with other married members. Workers are supposed to be homeless and without money, as per Matthew 10. They are meant to live in the homes of Friends, out of a suitcase. They are not formal employees or volunteers.

#### **1.4 No registrations**

The group believe that they report to God and only to God and they reject all registrations where possible. They are not a registered charity, registered business nor organisation. They have no registered name and use a variety of names internally – The Truth, The Way, The Fellowship. These are generalist names and make finding information online very difficult.

#### **1.5 Hierarchical Structure**

Though the group outwardly promotes simplicity, there is a distinct, though rarely discussed hierarchy to the group. The hierarchical structure is outlined as follows:

1	Overseer / Head Worker	<p>The most senior male worker designated to a large region. E.g. A state or 2 states where membership is lower i.e. Vic and Tas.</p> <p>Overseers make leadership decisions without transparency or input from ordinary members — known as "Friends." Decisions include matters such as: movement and pairing of Workers, distribution of monies and allocation of Eldership status to members, to name a few.</p> <p>They make decisions such as excommunications, give marriage advice and parenting guidance. They are not trained.</p> <p>Overseers often deny being leaders, insisting that God is the only true leader.</p>
2	Senior Male Workers	<p>Workers are celibate, same-sex pairs of preachers assigned to specific geographic regions, or "fields," by an overseer. They are expected to live without possessions or income, staying temporarily in the homes of Friends as they move through their assigned areas.</p> <p>A junior worker will generally travel with a senior worker of the same sex.</p> <p>There is no formal training for Workers. They learn by immersion and following senior workers.</p>
3	Junior Male Workers	
4	Senior Female Workers	
5	Junior Female Workers	
6	Elders	
7	Male Friends	<p>Typically the most senior married man in a local fellowship. Meetings are held in their homes.</p> <p>These are the ordinary members of the group.</p>
8	Female Friends	
9	Professing Children	<p>Children who have made a public declaration of faith, typically by age 12.</p> <p>The term "professing" refers to a formal declaration of commitment to the group. Children are often under immense pressure to profess at a young age.</p>
10	Non professing Children	<p>Children of member parents who have not professed.</p>

### **1.6 Informal leadership structure:**

There is an informal structure which is shared on small cards and verbally via Elders.

Overseer of Victoria: Believed to be [REDACTED] as at June 2025.

Overseer of NSW (and Australia): Believed to be [REDACTED] as at June 2025.

### **1.7 Decline in Numbers and Recent Crises**

It is difficult to determine the exact number of followers in Australia or globally due to the group's lack of formal documentation and its secretive nature. As of March 2023, global membership was estimated at around 75,000—down significantly from an estimated 200,000 in the mid-1990s. Much of this decline is attributed to member departures in the late 1990s, especially in Canada and Australia, after theological disagreements and the rise of the Internet exposed the group's hidden history.

Since March 2023, another significant exodus has occurred, this time due to revelations of widespread child sexual abuse (CSA) within the group and alleged cover-ups by leadership. Current estimates suggest global membership is now between 45,000 and 50,000, with numbers reportedly in decline and aging in most regions.

While numbers are difficult to quantify, there are estimated approximately 1,000 followers in Victoria presently. There are yearly conventions held on Truth 2x2 family farms at Colac, Speed, Drouin each year (in December and January). The followers (Friends) are widely spread across the state, although there is a tendency towards rural and regional communities. There are communities (not exclusive to these areas, examples only) at Colac, Geelong, Swan Hill, Mildura, Speed, Drouin/Gippsland, Burwood/Camberwell.

### **1.8 A Shift Toward Radicalisation**

Some within the group have referred to the current CSA crisis and exodus as “the great cleansing.” They believe declining numbers indicate that only the “true believers” will remain. In reality, what appears to be happening is the departure of more educated and progressive members, leaving behind a smaller, increasingly insular, and hard-line group.

As this shift continues, the remnants of the group may become even more cult-like in structure and worldview.

## **2. Recruitment Methods**

**2.1 Inviting people to free meetings:** Workers go out into their fields and hold gospel meetings usually twice per week. One meeting on a Sunday evening and another on a

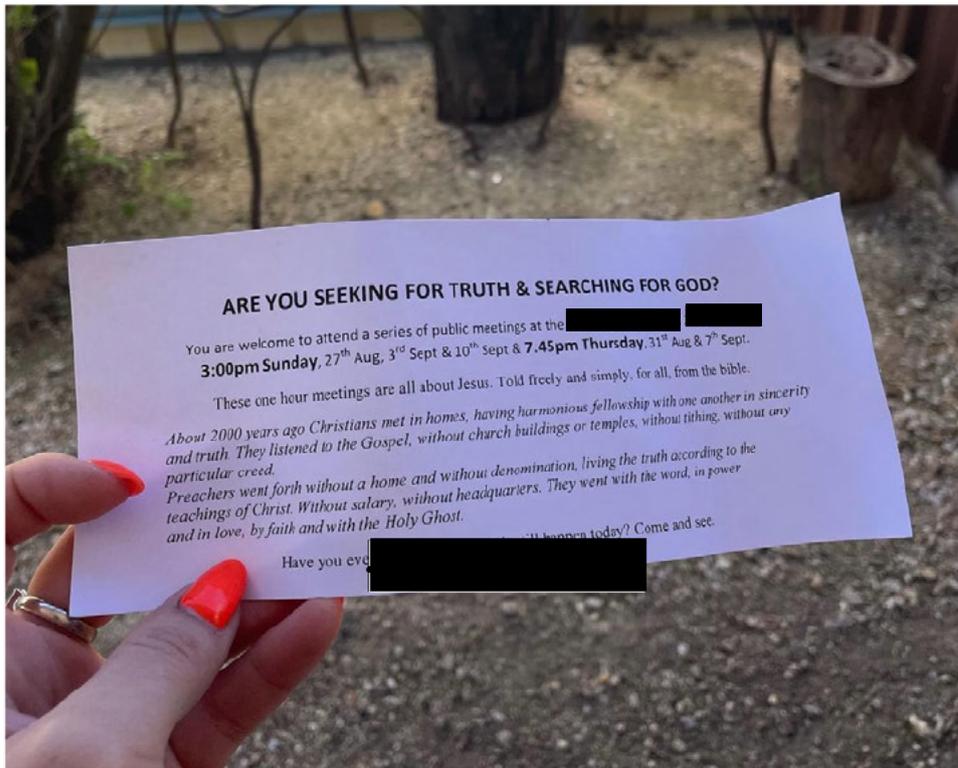
weeknight. People within the community are invited to attend these meetings either by: word of mouth, advertisement of these meetings in the local newspaper, written invitations dropped into people's letterboxes or public notices are put up in the community. These days, it's very rare that people within the general community attend these meetings. Sometimes a friend of a professing person may attend, but they don't usually continue to return a second time. Therefore, the focus has turned from recruitment within the outside community to targeting the children of already professing members within the group.

### 2.1.1 Example of recruitment flyers:

#### A June 2025 Example from Queensland:



## A 2023 Example from Northern Victoria



**2.2 Using social events to build rapport:** Annual 'conventions' are held in places all over the world for members across regions to congregate and spend 3-4 days together. These events are hosted by a member on private property and may consist of hundreds of attendees. They include three intensive meetings per day, meals and sleeping quarters that are separated into male and female dorms or individual tents. Members look forward to these conventions so they can meet up with their friends and also meet visiting workers that travel from overseas. Members themselves also travel significant distances, including interstate, to attend with their entire families. A significant unspoken reason for these conventions is for younger people to meet their future partners, as marrying within the group is strongly enforced. This ensures generational continuation – which the 2x2s survival is largely contingent on.

**2.3 Isolating recruits from outsiders:** Examples of exacerbating isolation include: forcing members to dress differently in very conservative and gender specific styles, expectation to attend several meetings per week, attending annual conventions and special meetings - basically attempting to take up all of member's time to prove their dedication. Further examples include discouraging social interactions with people outside of the group and discouraging entertainment outside of the group.

**2.4 Asking Recruits to commit small, then escalating:** The longer someone has been attending the group or the older they get, the expectations to be actively involved exponentially increase. For example, members will be spoken to by workers if they aren't attending meetings very often, or if they aren't fitting the dress code that's expected of them. If people are regarded as "faithful" – then they may be asked to

have a meeting in their home or to be an elder of the group. This pressure isn't placed on newer members, therefore giving them the misconception that the group is more flexible than what it is. It is a form of manipulation and lovebombing.

**2.5 Promising secret or higher knowledge:** The 2x2's believe that they promise to have/know the only way to heaven and a true relationship with God, who can guide your life and bring peace. 2x2 members are so deeply indoctrinated that they find it hard to understand why "outsiders" would not want to be a part of the group given they have this knowledge of so called "truth".

**2.6 Using charismatic leaders or influencers:** There is a "worker worship" culture within the 2x2 group, as they are seen as special and chosen by God and therefore, the workers are treated like Gods. Workers are seen as the mouthpiece of God on earth and automatically receive utmost respect and reverence as a greater authority on all things. They are to be supported financially and materially by the rest of the membership, including provisions of money, accommodation, food, cars to use, funds for health care, and any other needs. This often drives workers to become entitled and some begin to abuse this respect.

**2.7 Creating insider language and symbols:** Coded language is used within the 2x2's, which aims to separate the group and reinforces group identity. This distinct "us/them" language further drives isolation. Non-members are called "outsiders" or "strangers." Someone who leaves is said to have "lost out." This coded language can create shame and confusion, making it difficult for individuals to explain or process their experiences—especially when considering leaving.

The lack of any registered name for the group makes it difficult to research, talk about and seek support. The insider language creates an 'us' and 'them' culture, which is difficult to deconstruct from.

**2.8 Fake success stories:** Workers will frequently speak about traumatic events such as natural disasters that have occurred locally or in other parts of the world and always mention how God worked miracles. For example, if fire or flood occurred, they would make statements such as "It's a miracle that none of God's people (i.e. 2x2s) were harmed".

Followers are told stories of deaths and tragedies which have befallen people who have left the group. This scares followers into staying, lest something terrible happen to them for leaving.

**2.9 Offering to help solve a personal problem:** Workers are often seen as 'counsellors' within the group. Members seeking psychological help or outside support from professional health care is often discouraged, leaving members pressured to solely consult workers instead with any concerns or problems that they're experiencing. Consulting a worker on marital issues is not uncommon. The workers being unqualified in this role, will often direct a person to a passage in the bible or pray that God has a higher plan and it will all work out if they are faithful enough. The issue this

advice poses is that people often stay in abusive marriages and ongoing psychological issues.

Divorce and remarriage is highly discouraged and marrying outside is frowned upon.

### **3. Recruitment Tactics**

**3.1 Love bombing.** 2x2 workers and members will often overwhelm young people or newly interested people from outside with intense affection and attention. This practice is especially common when younger people are near to the age expected to profess or when outsiders attend meetings for the first time. Another time this is common practice is when someone newly professes or is baptised- making them feel special and as though they have made the right decision.

**3.2 Offering belonging and purpose:** Members carry a false sense of safety and security within their insular 2x2 community. This is reinforced by frequent rhetoric of distrust of 'outsiders', therefore, providing members with a sense of belonging and privilege for being part of such a perceived special community.

**3.3 Using front groups.** Although the 2x2's do not appear to use a front group, they are not transparent and do not present the whole story when people join. Therefore, members are joining under false pretences as leadership do not provide any information for people to look up and try to verify what they are joining.

There are no known registered entities in Australia. Finances are not transparent and are managed in cash. There are believed to be some family trusts which are managed by trusted Elders. This information is not possible to verify.

**3.4 Deceptive messaging.** There is a lot of deceptive and contradictive messaging used by the 2x2 group. The group claims to have no official name and is not a registered religious entity. They see themselves as 'not religious', therefore separating themselves from other Christian denominations. When questioned, members often describe themselves as home-based Christians, sincerely believing theirs is the only true and pure form of Christianity. Members assert they have no earthly leader, despite the existence of "overseers" who function as the primary decision-makers and spiritual authorities. They also claim to have no dedicated group buildings; even though large convention grounds exist where annual meetings are held. They claim to be "penniless"—despite the existence of secret family trust accounts with unknown sums of money. Some suggest these accounts could hold millions of dollars, as elderly members often leave their estates to the group in cash.

**3.4 Peer Recruitment.** There's huge pressure and responsibility placed upon members to "be a good example to others". This refers to the fact that you must be "as Godly as possible at all times" in order to influence others who have not professed yet to make this choice. At the same time, there's also the pressure to avoid being a "stumbling block" to someone else. This refers to the fact that members must not be

a “bad example” and be the cause of another person within the group to leave and subsequently end up in a “lost eternity” i.e. hell.

**3.5 Targeting the vulnerable.** Children are pressured to profess at a young age. Workers often spend extra time with families who have young children in order to influence/groom them into making this commitment to the group. Often workers will also target other vulnerable people within the community and ask them to attend their gospel meetings e.g. international students at university or by targeting lower socio-economic communities. They have also been known to target people in the justice system, on remand and in the prison system.

**3.6 Gradual Indoctrination.** Considering that the majority of people in the group are born into it, people are indoctrinated from a very young age or inherit this. It is expected that parents bring their children to meetings and instruct them to conform to the expectations of the “unwritten rules” e.g. Adhering to dress code and fearing the ‘worldly’ from a young age.

**3.7 Controlling time and information:** Subtle, yet powerful control tactics are used to maintain influence over members. Up to four meetings per week are designed not only for worship but to reinforce group identity and loyalty through repetition and preaching/indoctrination. Annual multi-day conventions intensify this experience, using hymns and emotionally charged messages to create a sense of spiritual urgency, often leading to trance-like emotional states.

Members are strongly discouraged from engaging with the outside world through television or music and workers have even discouraged the use of the internet. These are portrayed as “worldly” and spiritually dangerous. This information control helps insulate members from differing perspectives or critical thought. Some leaders even advise against attending university, suggesting that spiritual obedience is more important than personal ambition or education. This is particularly the case for women and girls.

**3.8 Manipulating emotions:** The 2x2 group uses guilt, fear, shame to enforce conformity or discourage doubt. This especially occurs when the workers are “testing” the meeting for young people or newcomers to make their choice to join the group. People are asked to stand to their feet to “profess” or “make their choice” to serve God after an extremely emotive speech and during a hymn that often mentions fearful statements about “losing out” or leaving things too late. This creates emotions of fear and anxiety – which is incredibly controlling of behaviour.

Also, once people have professed, there is a culture of encouraging vulnerability and brokenness in front of others. This leads to the impression of a level of intimacy that is non-existent. For example, people are encouraged to publicly confess in meetings that they are inadequate and need to do better each week.

In addition to this there is psychological/emotional manipulation by not being free to openly ask questions and encouraged to diligently obey. Asking questions are seen as

“doubting” or being on the wrong track. Therefore, members are forced into repressing independent thought processes in order to be accepted or not labelled as a troublemaker.

**3.9 Promising salvation/exclusivity:** The group claims to provide exclusive access to the truth, believing they are the “only true way to heaven.’ This makes people believe that they belong to something so special that only “few” people have the privilege of knowing about and that following the group will lead to heaven and makes people believe that they have a higher purpose.

This encourages followers to tolerate a wide range of abuses, as they believe that it is ‘the only’ way into heaven and suffering is the only way to access.

## **4. Behaviours and Methods of control**

**4.1 Controlling leadership:** Overseers and workers deny that they lead the 2x2 group, stating that God is the only leader. However, rigid authoritarianism exists as workers have absolute control in all matters, whilst members have no representation at all and are expected to follow their orders loyally and without questioning.

During the royal commission into institutional abuse, the Overseer at the time told Laura McConnell (who named them in the royal commission) that they were not an organisation, they were a ‘loose group of like-minded Christians who worshipped in the home’. They have also described themselves as a ‘home based bible study’ and ‘non-denominational Christians’. Recently in Western Australia, [REDACTED] (Possibly WA overseer) sent an email where he described the group as ‘not an organisation’ in reference to a need for liability insurance for a hall hire.

There is no formal documented leadership structure, no employee or volunteer records. No financial records or transparency around financial structures or entities.

Not only do the leadership try to control the congregation by taking up all their time by expecting members to commit to regular meetings, but they also dictate where members must attend meetings. I.e. which Elder’s house to worship in. This presents an array of challenges, including risking an individual’s psychological safety. There are many examples of survivors of abuse being told they must attend Meetings in the home of their perpetrator. There is no way to not attend Meetings – if you do not attend, you do not have access to salvation.

Members are also expected to conform to strict appearance guidelines and traditional gender roles. Appearance is tightly controlled, particularly for women and girls. Modesty is emphasised: dresses must be long, Trousers, makeup, and jewellery (except a simple wedding band) are discouraged. Women’s hair is expected to be long and often styled in buns.

Men are expected to be clean-shaven with short, tidy hair. Jeans are rarely worn to services; slacks and suits are more common.

The group reinforces extreme patriarchy and purity culture. Men are seen as the “head of the household,” while women are expected to be subservient, meek, and focused on caregiving roles or professions.

Another point to consider is the term “Spirit-led”, which is often used by workers to suggest that correct behaviour reflects spiritual alignment. Disagreement is often interpreted as spiritual failure. For example, the "right spirit" will supposedly lead women to wear dresses and grow long hair, or want to keep attending the meetings as much as they possibly can. Workers in the USA and Canada have recently declined implementing extensive policies developed by professionals regarding the handling of sexual abuse within the group and have chosen to use a “spirit led” approach instead. This suggests that workers will pray to God about the way these matters should be handled and choose rather than to follow written policies to listen to ‘the answers that God provides them with’.

**4.2 Isolation:** Members are incredibly isolated from the rest of the world. Workers will often preach in meetings and make statements such as “we should be in the world, but not *of* the world”- This refers to the fact that members are out going to school or work etc., however members should separate themselves from the world. Friendships and relationships outside of the group are highly discouraged- also attending social or community events including sporting events are discouraged as they’re often referred to as “worldly” or “ungodly” places.

Members are encouraged to marry young and within the faith, while divorce and remarriage carry heavy stigma and can lead to excommunication or social shunning. LGBTQIA+ identities are neither acknowledged nor accepted; individuals are pressured to suppress their true selves and often face excommunication if they come out. Families may experience heartbreak, viewing their loved ones as “lost” or destined for hell. These identities are treated with shame and are frequently kept secret to protect family reputation. There is a pervasive culture of avoidance around challenging or ‘taboo’ topics such as LGBTQIA+ issues and divorce, resulting in limited communication. This silence leaves those facing these struggles feeling isolated, pressured to deny or hide their experiences, or leave – facing isolation from family and their community.

**4.3 Loss of personal autonomy:** There is a huge loss of personal autonomy and expression due to the many strict rules and expectations surrounding how one must live their life. These include:

- Attending regular meetings multiple times a week
- Expectations surrounding appearance
- Conforming to traditional gender roles and purity culture i.e.. No sex before marriage.
- Isolating oneself from what is considered “worldly” activities or community events.
- Having to accommodate workers in the home on a regular basis for days or weeks at a time.

**4.5 Secrecy and deception:** There is significant secrecy surrounding their theology and leadership agenda and decision-making. There are very few published theological works or no formal publications beyond the King James Bible, a hymnbook, and a Wednesday night study card.

There are unwritten rules and doctrines and unspoken expectations and consequences for non-compliance—such as shunning or excommunication. There are typically up to four meetings per week, with strict expectations to attend all.

Workers, especially overseers, are secretive and often share information only with trusted elders. Regular members are usually kept in the dark about leadership or organisational decisions. They are often asked not to forward or share letters or emails—in some cases, they are instructed to burn letters so they "don't fall into the wrong hands." Followers are expected to accept what is said without question. Independent research—such as comparing Bible translations—is discouraged and considered "worldly." Theological debates or questioning workers are often viewed as signs of "losing faith."

The secrecy surrounding leadership decision making, information and theology mean that the 2x2 overseers/workers end up with zero accountability.

**4.6 Exploitation:** As already mentioned, members are expected to host workers in their home for free and for any length of time. Workers often take advantage of hospitality granted to them under an air of entitlement. In addition to this, workers present themselves as being homeless and penniless. Although money is often an unspoken topic, members feel obligated to finance workers with some people often leaving large sums of money in their will, in cash.

It's possible that some workers, especially female workers are also exploited as they are working for free and those who choose to leave the worker life often have nothing in the end: no career, no savings, no house, no superannuation.

There's also evidence of women and children being exploited by paedophiles and abusers who are usually in a position of power e.g. Overseers, workers and elders.

**4.7 Emotional and psychological manipulation:** Guilt, fear and exclusivity are used to exert control, and members are frequently warned that making choices outside the group can lead to disaster, such as dying suddenly in a car crash. Hymns like "*One Day Too Late*" and "*Life's Short Day Will Soon Be Over*," along with verses about Jesus coming "like a thief in the night," are regularly emphasised to create a sense of urgency and fear of being unprepared. Questions such as "What will you be doing when the Lord comes again?" are often asked to pressure individuals—especially young people—into committing to the group before it's "too late." Many testimonies within the group focus on feelings of inadequacy and the constant struggle to "try harder," which can leave members feeling they are never good enough.

## 5. Impacts of the 2x2 Group on Individuals

**5.1 Psychological Impact:** As with any coercive or high-control group, members of the 2x2 group experience significant fear and anxiety stemming from intense pressure to meet rigid expectations around appearance, meeting attendance, behaviour, and language. This environment fosters chronic stress, due to the constant threat of punishment or social exclusion for non-compliance. Over time, these stressors can escalate into more severe mental health conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder, depression, and CPTSD.

Because many members are born into the group, intergenerational trauma is prevalent. Generations of individuals have been exposed to prolonged periods of psychological control, creating patterns of suppressed emotional expression, fear-based compliance, and unresolved trauma passed down through families.

**5.2 Social Impact:** Members often struggle to form healthy attachments with people both inside and outside the group. Within the group, independent thinking and self-expression are discouraged, which inhibits authentic relationships. Love and respect are conditional—contingent on strict conformity. Expressing divergent views, values, or emotions is interpreted as spiritual disobedience, undermining one's standing within the group and leading to feelings of shame or alienation.

Externally, distrust of outsiders and fear of judgment impede members' ability to form meaningful connections, contributing to profound social isolation. Over time, this isolation hinders social development and reduces exposure to diverse ideas and social norms, leaving individuals ill equipped to navigate the broader world.

**5.3 Impact on Child Development:** The developmental impact on children raised in the 2x2 group is especially concerning. From an early age, children are taught to conform unquestioningly, suppressing their natural curiosity, creativity, and individuality. They are often required to sit silently through long, doctrinal meetings and discouraged from asking questions, internalising the message that faith should be blind and doubts are dangerous. Children are discouraged from critical thinking and emotional development.

This stunts their ability to trust their own judgment, form independent opinions, or build healthy boundaries—key elements in developing a strong, autonomous identity. Repeated messages about self-denial, not being “good enough” for God, and the need to “try harder” cultivate low self-esteem, guilt, and fear, especially concerning eternal consequences or divine punishment.

Restricted access to media, literature, and broader educational resources further limits critical thinking and awareness of the wider world, leading to underdeveloped intellectual and emotional skills.

Moreover, strict parenting practices are not only encouraged but often enforced through interpretations of scripture such as “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” Physical

punishment is an adverse childhood experience and is known to have links to long-term psychological harm, contributing to trauma, behavioural issues, and mental health struggles.

**5.4 Physical Impacts:** While the psychological and social consequences of involvement in the 2x2 group are significant, these effects can also manifest in physical health problems. Chronic stress from the pressure to conform to strict behavioural and religious expectations may result in fatigue, a weakened immune system, and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. [link.springer.com/dpi.com](https://link.springer.com/dpi.com)

Mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety—often stemming from isolation, guilt, or fear—can contribute to physical symptoms like headaches, digestive issues, and chronic pain. Studies have shown that approximately 40% of adults with chronic pain experience clinically significant depression and anxiety. These mental health conditions can exacerbate physical symptoms, leading to a cycle of distress and discomfort. [jamanetwork.com](https://jamanetwork.com)+[hopkinsmedicine.org](https://hopkinsmedicine.org)+[painnewsnetwork.org](https://painnewsnetwork.org)+[academic.oup.com](https://academic.oup.com)+[councilforrelationships.org](https://councilforrelationships.org)+[verywellmind.com](https://verywellmind.com)+[verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com)

Furthermore, teachings around sexual purity, modesty, and rigid gender roles may lead to repressed sexuality, lack of comprehensive sexual education, and restricted access to reproductive healthcare. Purity culture has been associated with increased anxiety, guilt, and sexual dysfunction, particularly among women. The emphasis on abstinence and traditional gender roles can contribute to confusion about sexual identity, potentially leading to long-term psychological and physical health issues. [academic.oup.com](https://academic.oup.com)+[councilforrelationships.org](https://councilforrelationships.org)+[verywellmind.com](https://verywellmind.com)+[verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com)

There is limited research, but it is common that Truth 2x2s have inflammatory diseases and chronic pain, and it is common to hear of ‘nerves’ being a problem in particular with women. This area needs much more research.

## 6. Policy and Legal Issues

### 6.1 Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Abuse

Ex-2x2 survivor groups have compiled lists of over 900 known abusers globally, most of who were in Worker or Elder roles. Abusive workers are often relocated but not removed. For example, a Worker who committed CSA in Victoria might be quietly sent overseas. This was the case with [REDACTED], who was moved from the Wodonga area to South America when accusations were made against him in the mid 1990s.

Preliminary surveys in Truth 2x2 survivor groups world-wide have found that the group has a much higher percentage of CSA and sexual abuse by clergy (workers) compared to that of the catholic church – at somewhere around five times the rate of CSA and sexual abuse.

There is a deeply troubling culture of silence surrounding CSA and sexual assault within the 2x2 group, where reports of abuse are often minimised, hidden, or entirely ignored. Overseers frequently avoid reporting incidents to law enforcement, behaving

as though their spiritual authority exempts them from legal responsibility. Due to a widespread distrust of outsiders and a strong emphasis on internal resolution, survivors rarely turn to the police, and when they do speak up, they are often met with spiritual platitudes instead of real support. Untrained workers may urge victims to forgive, pray more, or submit further, sometimes implying that the survivor's pain stems from a lack of the "right spirit." This response not only fails to protect the vulnerable but also isolates survivors, many of whom face shunning or subtle ostracism for breaking the unspoken rule of silence. The result is a community where abuse can flourish unchecked, and those who suffer are left without justice or healing.

## **6.2 Federal Royal Commission into institutional child abuse and associated Redress Scheme**

The group was named in this Royal Commission and has been requested to join the redress scheme. They are unable to join at this stage, as they have no registered entity and claim no way to pay the associated compensation to survivors.

They have a history of denying their existence and leadership structure through the inquiry. They use deceptive tactics such as refusing to register entities to avoid accountability and change.

By being named, the overseers have been asked by current followers what their safety measures are for children, and they have put some 'policies' in place, in word only. These policies are not legally enforceable, as no entity or structures exist around them. They are a placation method, to fob off questions from worried followers.

There are no governance structures, no accountability or transparency with this group and have left survivors with no redress for five years and counting.

## **6.3 US FBI Investigation**

There is an open FBI investigation into the group in the US following reporting in survivor communities about endemic CSA, SA, possible tax evasion and domestic/family violence going unreported by Workers and Elders. The moving of abusers and cash around the country, as reported by survivors to the authorities, has resulted in an investigation.

There is a call out for wide ranging information. Link here. <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/victim-services/seeking-victim-information/seeking-victim-information-in-2x2-investigation>

## **6.4 Leaving the Group**

Leaving the 2x2 group is an extremely difficult and life-altering process. Many members have lived in an insular environment since birth, meaning departure isn't just about leaving a belief system—it often means distancing from one's family, social network, and entire way of life.

The group's exclusivity fosters deep psychological dependency. Members are taught to fear the outside world, which is described as spiritually dangerous or corrupt. As a result, many feel paralysed by fear—of the unknown, of divine punishment, and of eternal damnation. This fear becomes a powerful deterrent, delaying the decision to leave for years.

Even when someone finds the courage to walk away, they're often met with emotional and relationship loss. While family members may not cut ties entirely, they often express their disappointment through remarks like, *"It's hard to be close to someone who doesn't share the same spiritual beliefs."* The emotional impact on loved ones—who sincerely believe the person is now doomed to a "lost eternity" adds another burden of guilt. Some members choose to stay, not out of faith, but to protect their family from this grief.

Workers may attempt to contact those who have left, to try and influence them to stay. However, communication is usually cut off entirely and what follows is a sudden and painful disconnection from everyone and everything familiar. The love and community once promised often prove to be conditional—dependent on continued conformity.

The aftermath of leaving is overwhelming. For many, the 2x2 belief system was inseparable from their identity and cultural upbringing. Most are born into it and being 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> generation is not uncommon.

Leaving the group often means losing not only their community, but also a sense of self. The silence that follows is deafening. Many ex-members assimilate quietly into mainstream life, rarely discussing their past. Shame, fear, and the absence of a shared vocabulary make it nearly impossible to explain what they've been through. This isolation is itself a hallmark of cult-like dynamics.

Deconstructing the indoctrination process is slow and painful. It can take years for ex-members to recognise the extent of the spiritual abuse and psychological trauma they endured. Unfortunately, most mental health professionals lack the training and understanding needed to support those leaving high-control religious groups. Without appropriate care, many ex-members suffer in silence, facing ongoing mental health issues, and a deep sense of alienation.

Currently, there is no law that holds group leaders accountable for harm or coercive control. In the case of the 2x2 group, Workers or Elders are not legally accountable for the damage caused. This legal and systemic gap leaves survivors without justice or support.

Leaving a high-control religious group like the 2x2 group is not simply a personal decision; it is a complex, painful, and often traumatising process. Greater awareness, professional education, and legislative reform are essential to provide the validation and support that ex-members so desperately need.

## 7. Recommendations for Reform – Internal 2x2 Change

These recommendations aim to create a healthier, safer, and more transparent environment for all members of the 2x2 group—or any group operating similarly. The goal is not to infringe upon religious freedom, but to protect vulnerable individuals, especially children, from systemic abuse and exploitation under the guise of faith.

### 7.1 Mandatory Registration of Religious Organizations

- **Issue:** The 2x2 group has historically avoided formal registration, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability.
- **Recommendation:** The 2x2 group, must be legally registered entities. This includes:
  - Listing a registered organisation
  - Listing a governing body.
  - Providing contact information.
  - Publicly disclosing organisational structure and leadership.

### 7.2 Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse

- **Issue:** Workers and Elders are often in unsupervised contact with children but are not required to report suspicions of abuse in a home-based context.
- **Recommendation:** All group leaders must be designated mandatory reporters under child protection laws in their jurisdiction, even if they are not operating as a registered employee but acting AS IF they're leaders of a registered organisation. If the average person would assume they're representing a registered group – they should considered as such.

### 7.3 Mandatory Ministry Safe Training

- **Issue:** There is currently no requirement for child safety or safeguarding training among workers or elders in a home-based setting.
- **Recommendation:** All individuals in leadership, including workers and elders, must complete an annual Ministry Safe or equivalent child protection course, focusing on:
  - Abuse prevention.
  - Recognising grooming behaviours.
  - Establishing healthy boundaries.

This should be legally required, even if no organisational group entity exists, if the average person would consider them to be 'leaders' and/or 'ministers of faith'.

### 7.4 Public Code of Conduct and Doctrinal Transparency

- **Issue:** The 2x2 group lacks a published doctrine, written standards of conduct, or member guidelines.

- **Recommendation:**
  - Create and publish a Code of Conduct applicable to all members and leaders.
  - Document and make accessible the doctrines and beliefs so members are informed of what they are committing to.
  - Provide mechanisms for accountability and reporting breaches of conduct.

## 7.5 Comprehensive Background Checks

- **Issue:** Workers operate with full authority and access to members (in their own personal homes), including minors, without any formal screening. This should be legally required regardless of whether a legal entity and employment linkage exists. If the average person would consider them to be 'leaders' they should be held to be accountable as such.
- **Recommendation:**
  - Require all missionaries and leaders to undergo criminal background checks, including:
    - Police checks
    - Working With Children Checks
    - The outcomes of these to be available to followers, and to be rechecked every 3 years.

## 7.6 Financial Transparency and Governance

- **Issue:** Members donate money in cash, without any public record of how finances are handled or leadership decisions are made.
- **Recommendation:**
  - Maintain a public financial register detailing income sources and expenditures.
  - Publish meeting minutes from leadership gatherings.
  - Establish internal controls and external audits to ensure ethical use of funds.
  - Donations to be made electronically, into an entity bank account with an electronic record. Cash not to be an acceptable form on donation.

## 7.7 Protection of Children from Psychological Harm

- **Issue:** Children are often indoctrinated from a young age and pressured to make spiritual commitments they do not understand.
- **Recommendation:**
  - Children should not be permitted to formally commit to the group or be baptized until they reach at least 18 years of age.
  - Teachings involving eternal punishment (e.g., hell) must not be used to frighten or manipulate minors.
  - Implement psychological screening and support for youth in religious environments.

## **8. Recommendation for Parliamentary reform/for this committee:**

### **8.1 Introduction of Coercive Control Laws to Cover Group Behaviour**

- **Issue:** Psychological manipulation and undue influence are often present in the form of spiritual authority and social control.
- **Recommendation:**
  - Introduce coercive control legislation that covers group spiritual and psychological abuse.
  - Hold group leaders legally accountable for indoctrination practices that harm mental health, development, or autonomy.
  - Ensure legislation encapsulates groups which are not formally registered but operate in a highly organised way.
  - Recognise that cults and high control groups will find ways to avoid accountability – that they are disingenuous. They will ask followers to lie, they will create shell entities without assets, they will hide assets and leadership structures.
  - Ensure any legislation recognises the complex ways which women coercively control children in high control environments. Ensure that any criminalisation's and legalisation does not unfairly criminalise women, who are often the gatekeepers and enforcers of culture and behaviour of children inside cult environments.

### **8.2 Creation of a Lived Experience Committee to advise government and policy making and agencies, on cult experience.**

To include representation from Truth 2x2 ex community in Victoria, with trauma informed support and practises to ensure the committee is well supported

### **8.3 Support and fund research into coercive group behaviour and the cult survivor experience.**

Ensure robust data exists on the drivers of abuse and coercion are well documented and understood, and proven methods of supporting survivors to build new lives can be referred to agencies.

### **8.4 Ensure agencies and survivor groups are well resourced and funded in Victoria to support cult survivors and their families.**

It is important that agencies and survivor advocates are provided trauma informed spaces and communities themselves to support other cult survivors.

- There is currently no known cult survivor services or supports in the state of Victoria which are funded. They are all run pro-bono by survivor advocates.

- Ensure this work encompasses deconstructing the deep impacts of family violence and male patriarchal entitlement which underpins community values in groups such as Truth 2x2s to ensure leavers do not continue to perpetuate harm in new communities outside cults.
- Enable funding for housing, medical support and Centrelink benefits for cult leaders who are under the age of independence (22 or 25) and cannot live with their legal guardian.
- Provide educational support (government support programs) for education for cult survivors who have had their education impacted and/or cut short due to negative cult attitudes to mainstream education. HELP style loans which also include a living allowance for instance
- Provide parenting support for new parents (of all genders) who have had cult experiences, to enable them to learn positive parenting in a mainstream context, and not to use coercion, violence and abuse in their own relationships with children.

#### **8.4. Develop and endorse a framework for identifying safe and unsafe group behaviours**

Develop and endorse a framework which can be used to assist with deconstruction for current cult members, conversation in supporting leavers, and for agencies and advocates to refer to in educational resources.

- What is safe v's unsafe group behaviour? What are the kinds of behaviours which would be considered 'cult' or 'fringe' compared to safe and mainstream group behaviour?
- What are the grey areas in this framework, and how can a group sitting in the grey area be encouraged to change their practises and behaviours to ensure safety for followers?

#### **8.5 Redress**

If a group repeatedly refuses to engage in education and change to be a safe group – what legal outcomes could be available to people harmed in that group?

- How could that group be called out publicly, and held to accountability by followers? How could the group be held to redress for survivors, especially in the situation where a group is unregistered with no formal assets, as is the case with 2x2s.