

## Question

**The CHAIR:** Okay. You have helped build a support network for survivors of cults and high-control organisations. How can the Victorian Government best support a network like yours to do the important work that you are doing?

**Ryan CAREY:** We need funding for counselling, and we need all those other networks to tie into what we are doing as far as support goes. We need oversight and laws to stop it from happening, but we need that back-end support into our groups. We are sort of jerry-rigging this together as we go.

**Catherine CAREY:** I think we can also take that question on notice. We have got a group submission that has been worked on with consultation from over 80 other survivors that goes into great detail on how best the government can support us. You will be receiving it shortly. It has been authored by Patrick McIvor, Renee Spencer, Clare McIvor and Janja Lalich, and it is in the process of getting survivor signatures at the moment. A number of other organisations, including ours, have signed on to support it and its recommendations. There is a great amount of detail on what the government can actively do and reasonably do to help in that space.

## Response-

Page 33-36 of the *Beyond Belief* group submission goes into great detail about how the government can assist in directly helping survivors, people attempting to leave coercive groups and affected family members.

## Question

**Chris COUZENS:** And just another question: you have made public statements on the similarities between coercive control in cults and family violence. What legislative models do you think could be adopted to address these issues?

**Catherine CAREY:** It needs to be its own separate—we took notes on this. At the moment it is legal, but it is harmful. It spans domains—psychological, spiritual, emotional, economic harms to people. It is non-physical, it is cumulative and it is enacted across multiple actors and systems, which makes it invisible to people, which is also the issue with domestic violence coercive control. Because it needs to be separate

**Ryan CAREY:** It needs to be tailored for that, really—for that group area. They are similar in their ways of coercion, but we have deliberately—and so it should be. The coercion in domestic violence is tailored to that. We do know that a cult is like a domestic violence situation; there is family and all that intertwined. The language that focuses on the coercion in that environment needs to be tailored to that as well. There is a good base model—we know there is good brickwork in there—for family violence, but a cult is virtually a big family, too, so it just sprays across. The joint submission we have got goes into greater detail. There was a list of about 200 behaviours in that joint submission that we have identified. That could probably go to about 600, but there are 200 key behaviours, to make it as binary as possible. We will get back to you on notice on that one, and we will give you more information

**Chris COUZENS:** If legislation was proposed, are there key elements that you see being critical to that piece of legislation in terms of coercive control and cults? You might want to defer back to your document, but I just wondered whether you had anything to add now.

**Catherine CAREY:** I think we will take that on notice. But it is group-based coercive control, so these protections would not just protect people who are in religious groups or fringe groups; it would also protect people who are in multilevel marketing schemes or businesses that practise coercive control. It would protect someone who is in a theatre group, for example—it would protect them against coercive control. We came into this thinking about religious coercion, and the Committee took it one step further, saying we

need to look at all groups, not just religious groups. The group submission has taken it a step further again and said no group should be able to practise this behaviour at all. It does go into incredible detail. I think rather than mangling the explanation, we will take that on notice, and you will be getting all that information very shortly.

## Response

Page 37 and 38 of the *Beyond Belief* group submission goes into great detail about the Legal and Regulatory Reform that we are proposing to the Victorian Government.

## Question

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Would you share those complaints?

**Catherine CAREY:** Definitely, yes.

**Ryan CAREY:** There is one recently that we got, yes—and, like, obvious stuff going on, and it is just dead air. No even acknowledgement we sent the email—nothing.

**Catherine CAREY:** Or just a generic ‘Thank you for your submission’.

## Response

[REDACTED]

## Question

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I would like to follow on from a couple of Annabelle’s questions. You are also welcome to take these on notice, because I think they are both areas of great interest to the Committee. Firstly, on child care and childminding arrangements, is there anything else that you would like to add around either formal or informal child care or childminding arrangements at the GRC? If you would like to reflect on that and take that on notice, you would be welcome to as well, or you could answer it now.

**Catherine CAREY:** Yes, we might take that one on notice.

**Ryan CAREY:** There needs to be a complete framework and people to actually look into it. So yes, we will take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I think the Committee would be interested to better understand and have an overview of the different types of child care and childminding arrangements and, in your experience, what kind of regulation there was, what kind of regulation was enforced or not enforced and any suggestions or areas of improvement.

**Ryan CAREY:** Yes, we will take that on notice, because we can go into a lot of detail on that.

**Catherine CAREY:** Yes.

## Response

The GRC has a number of formal and informal child care arrangements. The formal arrangements include

- 1- Looking after infants in a room attached to the main hall, where mothers can be gotten from the meetings for feeding. This is performed by 2 mainly older women, mostly around grandmother age. On a Wednesday night meeting, this would be done by 1 of the mothers.

- 2- Looking after toddlers during the meeting in two separate areas onsite (split up by age, from crawling to 2 ½ years old). This is done by 2 of the actual mothers, with assistance from a teenager on occasion.
- 3- Looking after toddlers in a room at night meetings, getting them to sleep. This is performed by 2 women of all ages, on occasion with a teenager also, if the group is large. There could be between 5-15 children in this room.
- 4- Looking after children in the Sunday School hall at night meetings while they go to sleep. This group ranged from 3 ½- 10 approximately, until the parents had decided the child was old enough to stay awake during the meeting. This was done by 2 women of all ages. There would be at times over 50 children in this room.
- 5- Looking after the children in a side room at the Drysdale hall during the Wednesday meeting. (A number of the group attended meetings in Drysdale for the midweek meeting, so they didn't have to come to Norlane.) This is currently being done by 1 women.

These are the formal arrangements for childminding. There was a rostering system that you were placed on to perform childminding and there is no training provided, other than what the other women (and parents) instruct you to do. Many parents would ask you to smack their child if you thought it was appropriate. There are no child safe policies that the women providing childminding have to sign on to and no ratio requirements.

Sunday school is another formal childcare situation. There are no signed child safe policy requirements, nor displayed child safe policies. In the groups with smaller children, there may be two women in that group, so one can take children to the toilet, but in the older group, there is one adult alone in the room with children, without windows or line of sight in for these rooms. There is no specific training other than being told to seek the lord and no oversight checking on what you are telling these children.

Informal childminding arrangements are mainly parents grouping together to share childminding arrangements during a fast (an all day church event every 6 weeks approximately), so that parents could attend the fast together. Some assemblies chose the groups you are in, some allow you to make your own. This childminding would be done in one of the families homes and would last from about 8:30am to 8pm.

Young Peoples could be considered an informal childcare situation. There are adults there mixing with children from 14 upwards. We believe they may have stopped this practice now, but for many years, if a child needed a lift home, they would have to raise their hand and say where they needed the lift to. Then anyone could volunteer to take them and they would then have to be alone in the car with them. The Young Peoples Leaders also speak with children in closed rooms alone, in order to interrogate them or discipline them. There is no question of refusing to comply with this. Once again, there are no child safe policies, either signed on to or displayed.

The GRC also spent a significant amount of time circumventing the laws around caring for children. They originally had an offsite childcare, conducted in a local high school. This was raided by DHS in 2006 after being tipped off by an ex-member, upon hearing that two children had escaped. It was shut down due to not having a license to operate. A newspaper article detailing this has been attached at the end of this document. After this, they spent approximately 2 years having smaller groups of children (between 4-6) looked after by a mother and another woman. One of the woman had to be related to one of the children present in order to comply with these standards. We then moved to the current situation, where the children are all looked after onsite.

It is a fair bigger current issue then just the GRC, but we would suggest that all groups that are providing anything to children, or even just have children attending should have to both publicly display their child safe policies and submit them for review. All those who attend such a place would need to sign on that

they have read the policies and agree to follow them. All of these places need to be inspected by government to ensure they are complying with government regulation around children, as well as following their own policies. At the moment, the system is a reactive system, not a proactive one. There is definitely the need for some major funding boosts in this area to ensure that our children are protected.

### Question

**The CHAIR:** Great. Secondly, on Annabelle's questions around the finances and charity laws, I think we would be interested to know how the Victorian Government or even how the federal government could strengthen these laws to prevent people from suffering.

**Catherine CAREY:** I think we will take that one on notice. There is a lot of detail that we can probably go into for that one.

### Response

We believe that the laws around what constitutes a charity needs to be significantly tightened. Currently, the Trustee for Revival Trust (which is the registered name for the GRC) sub type is 'Advancing religion' and their charity activities are 'Training of young people to be law-abiding citizens, free of drugs and riotous behaviour. Training towards being successful and responsible marriage partners.' These are ridiculous (and untruthful) suggestions, the GRC is not a registered training organisation and the damage they are doing to young people is far greater than any benefits that they are providing. Without being able to provide any benefits to the wider community, there shouldn't be any tax free status applied to them.

We would also suggest that the threshold of \$3 million to submit an audited financial report is too high. Basic religious charities are not required to submit a financial report if under this amount and there is no way of knowing where the money is going. They also state on their annual statement that they will be doing no fundraising during the next reporting period, we would argue that asking for tithes is definitely a form of fundraising. We have attached their reporting statement from 2024 for your information.

### Question

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. My two questions on notice are—if you could just respond when you have time. One of our huge challenges that we are going to have to battle with is: how do you legislate some form of consequence or punishment to a pastor when a lot of the work has been executed by the elders and other people? I just think if you have got any guidance on how you go to the top—and not necessarily by punishing, because a lot of them are parents and in relationships, and I understand that will restrict people from –

**Catherine CAREY:** Yes, that is something we have thought about. We will take that on notice, but we do have the answers for that one.

**Ryan CAREY:** That is in the group submission, yes.

### Response

In Appendix B of *Beyond Belief*, it lays out a tiered response to reports of group based coercive control. Those who may be at the lower levels of perpetrating coercion against others may be reported and required to undertake some form of education. This may assist them in understanding coercion that is being perpetrated against them and therefore assist in both helping them to remove themselves from that situation, and make it possible for them to report high levels of coercion being performed by the leaders of these groups.

Also, by implementing an Independent Commissioner for Coercive Group Harm (page 35), they would be able to monitor groups and ensure that the correct recommendations to police and DFFH were being made.

### Question

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Great. Thank you, Ryan. Another one is just you mentioned earlier AOD, alcohol and other drug, counselling and support associated with cults. If you have got any evidence associated to that and groups and guidance on why we have seen religious cults branch out into AOD, that would be really informative.

**Ryan CAREY:** Yes, I will take that on notice. There is a lot.

## Response

We have found that there is very limited regulation around who can set up a rehab centre and it is obviously a space that attracts very vulnerable, often isolated people. We have linked a number of articles where organisations have been found to have unscrupulous practices in this space.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-11/scientology-drug-rehabilitation-centre-fined-for-misleading/6459716>

<https://www.crikey.com.au/2022/06/21/taxpayers-pay-for-hillsong-indoctrination-centre-with-a-mild-interest-in-rehab/>

<https://www.crikey.com.au/2022/06/22/drug-and-alcohol-rehab-faith-based-bodies-step-in/>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-10/esther-house-abuse-allegations-apology-exorcisms-perth/100895888>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-16/inside-controversial-drug-alcohol-rehab-centre-healing-house/12952436>

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# Revival centre creche probed

PETER BEGG

A CRECHE operated by the Geelong Revival Centre in Norlane has been forced to close by the Department of Human Services.

The creche had operated out of the Norlane High School gymnasium on Sundays as parents attended meetings at the Geelong Revival Centre in Thompson Road.

A spokesman for the Department of Human Services said its Geelong office became aware earlier this month of an unlicensed childcare service operating on Sundays at a Norlane secondary school.

"The Geelong Revival Centre, a registered company, was running the Sunday-only service but not as a Sunday school," the spokesman said.

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"Under the Children's Services Act, a licence is required to care for or educate five or more children in the absence of their parents for fee or reward, or while the parents or guardians use services or facilities provided by the proprietor.

"DHS issued an on-the-spot warning over the breach and is meeting with church elders to discuss the issue."

The news of the creche being forced to close was unveiled on an internet chatroom.

A former Geelong Revival Centre member, David Erwin, wrote to the department after hearing on the chatroom claims that two children had "escaped" from the creche in Cox Road one Sunday about 18 months ago.

Mr Erwin said the creche was operated by Geelong Revival Centre P/L, which was no longer a not-for-profit organisation, and could therefore no longer operate the creche.

Church leader Pastor Noel Hollins said yesterday that he would prefer not to comment at this stage.

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