

# **T R A N S C R I P T**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE**

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

Melbourne – Wednesday 23 July 2025

#### **MEMBERS**

Ella George – Chair

Annabelle Cleeland – Deputy Chair

Chris Couzens

John Lister

Cindy McLeish

Jackson Taylor

Rachel Westaway

#### **WITNESS**

Gloria.

**The CHAIR:** Good morning. My name is Ella George, and I am the Chair of the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee. I open this meeting of the Committee about its Inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future and extend that respect to First Nations people across Victoria. I thank Victoria's First Nations people for their many thousands of years of care for this country.

I am joined today by my fellow Committee Members Annabelle Cleeland, the Member for Euroa and Deputy Chair; Cindy McLeish, the Member for Eildon; Christine Couzens, the Member for Geelong; Rachel Westaway, the Member for Prahran; and John Lister, the Member for Werribee.

Today we are joined by Gloria. Gloria, thank you very much for making the time to speak to our Committee. We recognise the significance of you coming here today to share your lived experience and acknowledge that sharing your experience and trauma may be emotional. Our inquiry is not about judging or questioning anyone's beliefs. What we are focused on is the behaviour of cults and high-control groups that use coercive techniques to recruit and control their members and the impacts of these behaviours. We are interested to hear from you and learn about your lived experience, including the recruitment methods used by the group, its impacts on individuals and communities, and your experience of leaving the group. The Committee is also interested in what recommendations you would like to see the Committee make to the Victorian Government in this space.

All evidence given today is being transcribed by Hansard. It is protected by parliamentary privilege, but comments repeated outside this meeting may not be protected by this privilege.

You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript that you can review and advise us if you are comfortable for the Committee to decide for it to be made public with your name and any identifying details removed or to be kept private.

Gloria, I would like to invite you to start by sharing your experience, and then, if it is all right with you, Members will ask a few questions. Thank you.

**Gloria:** My name is Gloria. I was recruited into Shincheonji in 2019 on the streets of Melbourne—on Elizabeth Street. My recruiter was basically pretending to be a uni student. He was actually a uni student, but the way that he recruited me was through a survey that he said was from uni, but in reality it was not. The survey questions included three types of emoji: prayer hands, a dancing person in a red gown and a plane. He asked me to pick one of the emojis, and that piqued my interest. I picked the prayer hands because I grew up in a Christian family. From then on the conversation went into the area of religion, and he then asked me how long I had been in Melbourne. At that time it was about the two-month mark that I had been in Melbourne. Then he told me that he had a friend who had a similar hobby to mine, because I also told him that I liked photography—I was holding a camera at the time. He offered to introduce me to his friend that had a similar hobby to mine, so we ended up meeting that friend the week after that.

In that meeting I did not expect it to be religious. It was such a friendly meeting with [REDACTED] at the time. However, in our conversation she started to bring up religion. She started to bring up how she was also teaching the Bible. Growing up Christian, I was not a religious Christian; I just happened to be Christian because of my parents, and I had never been into any Bible study prior to that, so I took it as probably a great chance to maybe get to know about my faith in a way.

The two-times-a-week Bible study ended up being three times a week, and eventually I was a full-time member over the time, and I was in SCJ for 4½ years. I have been in a few positions in SCJ. The longest position that I held was as an evangelism leader, where I taught people how to recruit—how to technically manipulate them in the recruitment process. So yes, I think that was my experience in SCJ.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Gloria. I would like to start by asking some questions about recruitment if that is okay. You have spoken about your experience of being recruited. Are you able to speak more generally about the methods used by SCJ to recruit new members and how they use those methods with other people?

**Gloria:** There are four types of methods that they use for recruitment. The first method is walk-up evangelism, where they meet people on the streets. They just happen to be looking around, and then they pretend to be looking for a good restaurant recommendation, talking to strangers as an opening statement. They could also do surveys or could also do different types of approaches, like asking for a specific location, like where to go as a student, for example. Or let us say if they are in university, they will ask people inside the university, 'Where's the library?' to open up the conversation, basically. Other than that, they also recruit people through social media. It could be Bumble or Tinder or Instagram. They approach people who, for example, follow a Christian account on Instagram, and then they send a message to them saying 'I happened to see you on this account' and stuff like that to start the conversation. Other than that, it could be through family members or friends or acquaintances that they have at their workplace. These are the most effective ways of recruitment, because technically they have known the people for a while, even before SCJ, so the people that they are trying to recruit feel more comfortable in going to Bible study with them, in a sense, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Are there any particular groups of people that were targeted by SCJ for recruitment, and if so, why were these people targeted?

**Gloria:** There are no specific people that are being targeted, but they do have recruitment criteria: people without disability—and this is included in discrimination technically—people without financial struggle, people without any sort of problem, basically, mental health problems included. Also, they are targeting people who are Australians, or at least who have a minimum three-year visa. This is from my experience last time, but the recruitment criteria will always change, because at one point in 2022 they were only recruiting Australians. Yes, most of the people who are getting recruited happen to come from youth, the majority, because a lot of people in their youth are open to making friends, technically. So, it is not that they are picky on who to recruit, it just happens to be a lot of youth.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. And do you think international students are more vulnerable to recruitment from SCJ or other similar high-control groups?

**Gloria:** I would agree, because they are new to the country, so they have no idea of what is going on in Australia, especially about the cult recruitments going on in Australia. This is why there are around 40 to 60% of international students in the Shincheonji cult, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Is that 40 to 60% of SCJ members are international students?

**Gloria:** Yes, that is right, 40 to 60.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. You have spoken about the different types of recruitment and some recruitment taking place, say, at a university campus or out on the street and you are asked to complete a survey. Are you able to tell us a bit more about when and where recruitment took place? And were some locations effective recruitment places or frequently used by recruiters?

**Gloria:** Often used locations are train stations or shopping centres—anywhere actually, not only in the CBD. At the moment, from my friends inside, I hear that they are dividing groups into people who are living in the suburbs. The people who are living in the suburbs are no longer required to come to the CBD to recruit. They are kind of spreading out because there is too much remorse about SCJ recruiting in the CBD; that is why they are spreading out. So shopping centres, train stations and universities are the main targets. Also, they do infiltrate churches. Say, for example, they sit down next to you in a church service if they notice that you are alone. They always approach people who are alone, because sometimes it is one person, the recruiter, and sometimes it is two people. Two versus one is kind of a losing number, if that makes sense.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Just one more question about recruitment: you mentioned a lot of recruitment takes place at universities. Have you seen universities respond to this? Have you seen universities try and stop recruitment on their campuses?

**Gloria:** For me, I am from Swinburne. There is staff training going on in Swinburne. But in terms of actual action kicking people out of the university space itself, I have not seen it yet. At one point I was in Swinburne, and I saw there were recruiters inside. I reported this to the security while pointing out the people that were currently talking to their target recruit at that time, but they did not do anything because these people looked like students and they were not doing anything physically dangerous. But from other universities, from my

experience—because I also talked to the journalists, and they did ask the universities about cult recruitment that is happening on campus—some universities, like RMIT, denied that there were any reports from students, although I have friends who are studying at RMIT and Melbourne Uni and I have told them to make a report about this. I am not sure why the university still denies that.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thanks, Gloria. Annabelle.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Thank you, Gloria. Does the SCJ have charity status?

**Gloria:** They have charity status at the moment. They used to have two charity statuses. One is for their front group, called HWPL. This front group is basically very active in politics and charity.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Is that an acronym for something?

**Gloria:** ‘Heavenly world peace organisation’, if I am not mistaken—so HWPL.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay.

**Gloria:** That is one of them. But I do not see that anymore on the charity—I am not sure why. And there is another one that is under their direct name, Shincheonji.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. Were you required to give money to SCJ?

**Gloria:** They always say that it is not compulsory to donate, but also at the same time it is mentioned that you have to give. There is some sort of gaslighting happening. There is some sort of coercive control, I would say, happening, because we even have a group chat for all the members in our cell group, which would take place inside. It is kind of pressuring people to give, because when you see that you do not have a tick on your name, you feel pressure, right? There were always reminders from the group leaders, for example. I was part of the accounting team at one point as well. In the meeting of this accounting team they did call out groups that had low contributions on donation. As the accounting team at the time, I was feeling pressure to remind my members about giving tithes and stuff like that. In Christianity is not compulsory to do that. This is what makes the difference between cults and Christianity.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** When you were on the accounting team, did you have transparency over the financials of the group, and was it quite well off?

**Gloria:** I only knew what happened inside my cell group, but not in other cell groups and not in the entire church. I did make a complaint about that to them, and then they did show the expenses and the income of the church monthly after that. But there were no clear amounts for where all these transactions were going, because no-one gets paid in the church but somehow there is a lot of spending in it. But from what I heard from other members who have been inside longer, the group leader, the church leader—at least the one in Melbourne—uses a lot of funds for his travel, for renting a car. Someone even just bought a new car, I think.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Are there children involved in SCJ?

**Gloria:** Sorry?

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Are there children’s members—under-18-year-old members?

**Gloria:** Yes, there are. These children are basically children of current members inside. They have some sort of training as well, as children, that requires them to attend a certain indoctrination session, and this indoctrination session can be lengthy, from my understanding.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. Do leaders or senior people have working with children checks, are you aware? Do you have one? Because you were in a leadership position.

**Gloria:** I was not part of that team, so I do not have one because I never worked in there. But from what I know, they are trying to get people to apply for that. They try to avoid as many legal problems as possible, but I am aware of other legal problems as well.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. So there are no rumours or allegations of child abuse?

**Gloria:** Child abuse—at the moment, no.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. I will pass it on. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Gloria, I think I just heard you mention that you are aware of other legal problems. Is that right?

**Gloria:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Is that something you could expand on?

**Gloria:** Okay. For example, fraudulent visa applications—there are a few members in SCJ, especially those top leaders in Australia, for example, who are staying in Australia under a student visa while they are actually not studying, or there are some members that are getting an arranged visa marriage with another member that is Australian or a permanent resident to help them stay in Australia. I heard this from other Shincheonji members that are directly in touch with these people. It is something that is not discussed openly within Shincheonji itself, it is something that is rumoured to be going on inside.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you.

**Gloria:** And there are also a lot of fraudulent letters going on inside. For example, I was living with a Shincheonji member up to 2024—no, 2023. So at one point, because I was no longer active in SCJ, they did not like me there. My housemate at the time sent me a fake eviction letter using the names of the real estate agent and the company of the real estate agent, and then when I checked the letter there were a lot of grammatical mistakes. I called the agent the next day, and they said, ‘Yes, it is fraudulent.’ And then I figured that it had not only happened to me, it had also happened to other ex-members. When I talked to one of them as well, that is how they kicked them out of their house—things like that, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Christine.

**Chris COUZENS:** Thank you very much for coming in today—we really appreciate it—and thank you for the work that you are doing in this space. Just going back to the recruitment, when recruiters were out there trying to get people to come in or sign in, was their aim to get contact details straight up so that they could then contact them?

**Gloria:** Yes. There is always a checklist and a process inside. There are three types of processes. The first one is fishing. It is when you are going outside or going on fishing media and finding your target. And then, secondly, meeting is when you have a first meeting with them to check their criteria—whether they fulfil the criteria that they have or not. And then the third is picking. Picking is convincing someone to agree to a two-times- or three-times-a-week Bible study.

The fishing stage requires recruiters to get the contact details, especially phone numbers, of the target recruit to be considered as a fish—it is a target recruit, yes. They even have a checklist of it, and they even have a follow-up list on that. And then after that, at the meeting stage, they also have a checklist and a reporting list on how we can proceed with this person, and then they normally share about this target recruit with their adviser to know what the best way is to manipulate them to get them into Bible study. Then after that, picking. At the picking stage, when the recruit agrees to do two times or three times a week Bible study, they create a group chat with the Bible teacher and the recruiter without the recruit in it, so that they can discuss how to bring this person in or how to keep this person inside the Bible study, and then anything that the recruit shares to the recruiter will also be shared to the Bible study teacher or an adviser without the recruit knowing.

**Chris COUZENS:** Do you know how many members there are now?

**Gloria:** At the moment, in Melbourne, roughly there are around 700 to 800 people, but across Australia, there are around 1,000 or 2,000, from my memory, yes.

**Chris COUZENS:** Okay. You mentioned that they were—did I get this right—moving out of the city and going into the suburbs?

**Gloria:** Yes. They are also going into regional areas like Geelong and some other places as well.

**Chris COUZENS:** Okay. And would you be willing to share what other activities and tactics that have been used by SCJ?

**Gloria:** Could you clarify ‘tactics’? Because they do definitely use deceptive and manipulative tactics, like I just explained before.

Oh, yes, also, sometimes they run an event for recruitment purposes. This event disguised as a random casual social event sometimes can be that, sometimes it can also be a random casual Christian event—it really depends on what the team is. This is to help the recruit bond with the recruiters or to make them meet a Bible teacher inside that event. It really depends on the purpose from each person. Also, I am speaking about other departments, because like I said, they also have the HWPL department, which is more towards political and charity purposes, they did run a lot of charity events for PR purposes or just to rub shoulders with other political figures or community leaders.

**Chris COUZENS:** Did they have control over what you wore, where you lived, all those things?

**Gloria:** Yes. I will start from what I wore inside. We normally wear a white top with black pants or a skirt for service, which is on Sunday and Wednesday. Other than that, in meetings, let us say on leader meetings or any meetings actually, they tell us not to wear jeans. [REDACTED] members getting scolded when they attended meeting in jeans and also members getting scolded when they came in late—5 minutes late, for example, for a 6 am meeting, or a late-night meeting at 12 am. Other than that, the housing situation inside Shincheonji—I am aware that there are members who are currently living with their family. However, they have been encouraged to live with other Shincheonji members. This is a form of isolation. They do encourage people to live with other Shincheonji members. They say that it is because family members would not understand what they are doing. Only Shincheonji members will understand what they are doing when they go out from the house early in the morning and come back in late.

**Chris COUZENS:** Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Cindy.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Thank you. Thank you so much for coming in. This is really quite fascinating. Just touching on the meetings, what times of the day did you say that they had those meetings?

**Gloria:** It really depends on your role inside the group. For me personally, from my experience, it was a 6 am meeting in North Melbourne.

**Cindy McLEISH:** 6 am in North Melbourne.

**Gloria:** 6 am—sometimes it is 7 am; it depends, and you cannot be late at all. Other than that, 12 am—sometimes it is 10 pm. It really depends on the meeting.

**Cindy McLEISH:** So 12:00 midnight?

**Gloria:** Midnight, yes.

**Cindy McLEISH:** For how long? What was the meeting duration?

**Gloria:** It depends on the meeting itself. It is 1 to 2 hours, yes.

**Cindy McLEISH:** When you were there and delivering Bible studies, as you escalated through, did you have training to be able to deliver them or did they just think as you had been there for a couple of years that you knew about the Bible more than other people?

**Gloria:** No. We had special training, especially for those who were appointed to become a Bible teacher; I was one before. Then the training is intense: you have to memorise, for example, a hundred verses of the Bible, and then it has to be word by word; you have to have no mistakes in it. They also have tests to become Bible teachers. Then you have a requirement of having to recruit one person or two persons in order to become a

Bible teacher. It was such an intense requirement, such an intense training, yes, so not everyone could be a Bible teacher at that time.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Who was in charge?

**Gloria:** In Melbourne?

**Cindy McLEISH:** Yes.

**Gloria:** [REDACTED]

**Cindy McLEISH:** And did they live in Melbourne?

**Gloria:** They live in Melbourne. I am also aware of another leader who has a tourist visa in Melbourne, and then I believe that he has been using congregation money to travel in and out of Australia, from Australia to Korea, because as a tourist on tourist visa you cannot stay longer in Australia, right—for more than three months—from my knowledge, yes.

**Cindy McLEISH:** So that is where you think some of the donations are going –

**Gloria:** Yes.

**Cindy McLEISH:** What is the aim, do you think, of the cult? What do they want overall?

**Gloria:** Free labour and money.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Money for their own indulgence –

**Gloria:** For the cult itself.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Do they funnel it back to Korea?

**Gloria:** I believe that they funnel it back to Korea. I mean, like I said before, there is no clarity on where all this money is going to. In Korea itself there is a lot of news about this cult, basically, building their temples—they call it a temple instead of a church—or building a park for this cult and also to pay for fines, because at one point there was also an allegation that they were breaching a lot of laws in Korea. So a lot of this money is paying for legal costs in Korea. Also about the restrictions that you said, I just remembered that during service time, especially on Sunday, you are not allowed to use the toilet at all, and service can go for 2 hours to 4 hours. So people basically have to stay in their spot during that time—no breaks at all.

**Cindy McLEISH:** What if you need to go?

**Gloria:** No, you cannot.

**Cindy McLEISH:** What does a scolding look like? You said earlier that if somebody comes in late, they get a scolding. Is that being publicly yelled at?

**Gloria:** It is publicly yelled at. There is also public humiliation going on inside. Then I even saw, because the males' and the women's sections during service are separated and as you know we were sitting on the floor without chairs cross-legged or kneeling, and obviously 2 to 4 hours is such torture, at one point there was a bloodstain on the carpet on the women's section, so I believe that someone had had their period there.

**Cindy McLEISH:** And they could not do anything about it. Did you ever talk to anyone within SCJ about your concerns?

**Gloria:** I did not bring up openly my concerns, because I knew that I would be looked down on for that. So what I did do was I mentioned a case study that happened, let us say, in a toxic environment in a workplace, and surprisingly a lot of the Shincheonji members agreed about that. I was doing it pretty much smoothly so I was not looked down on.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** John.

**John LISTER:** Thank you so much for coming in. I think the work that you are doing is really admirable. I really want to have a focus on your experience as an international student, particularly when you first came across to Australia—was it in 2019?

**Gloria:** 2019.

**John LISTER:** Yes—a rough time to come, in any circumstances. When you arrived in Australia, what sort of support around the social or community expectations that you should have as a student in Melbourne or Adelaide or wherever—did you have any kind of formal training, or did you have any kind of education from the university that helped you to come to Australia? Was there any kind of formal engagement?

**Gloria:** No. Well, actually, on orientation day there is always that sort of education. However, it is not mentioned about any cult or scams going on.

**John LISTER:** When you were doing those orientation activities, were you linked in with people who were also doing similar courses or from similar international student backgrounds by the university? Are there any kinds of programs like that?

**Gloria:** No, I was not linked into anyone, because in 2019, I do not think that there was much awareness about this cult.

**John LISTER:** What sort of education would be most valuable for younger people, whether or not they are Australian or international students, to increase awareness of these groups?

**Gloria:** For Australians I would say that early education during high school at least is required, because they only recruit people aged 18 or above. But if they happen to encounter someone who is, let us say 17 or 16, they will still put down their contacts, but in a treasure box—they call it a treasure box, and it is for them to contact these people again once they turn 18. By that time they will know about the recruiter and they probably will get along because they probably have known them for like two or three years. So that is for Australians: early education in high school at least. And for internationals, I would say on orientation day it would be preferable that there is mention of these things going on.

**John LISTER:** What sort of programs do you think would help people develop social relationships? One of the things that they prey on is people being alone or people being isolated. What sort of programs would help to prevent that isolation?

**Gloria:** I will need to get back to you on this question.

**John LISTER:** Yes, no worries. I would really appreciate that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Rachel.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Thank you for being so brave to come and speak to us, because as an international student, I can understand coming to a government organisation can be a bit overwhelming, so we very much appreciate your frankness and experience. Had you ever heard of SCJ before coming to Australia?

**Gloria:** I had not heard anything about that.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Okay. You spoke about recruitment of international students, and I am particularly interested in that. Given the 40 to 60% of congregation members or cult members that you say are generally international students, is it a broad ethnicity that they are targeting or is it predominantly Korean?

**Gloria:** It is a broad ethnicity, but from my knowledge, inside SCJ, they approach people who tend to look like people who are going to church—friendly faces—or maybe from a certain ethnicity, let us say African, because Africans are pretty big on church; Filipinos as well. So people who look like that.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Okay, so Asian or African people?

**Gloria:** Yes.



**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Thank you. You mentioned concerns pertaining to arranged marriages and fraudulent documents, which leads me to think and question whether there is any type of immigration racket going on. Is that something that you were suggesting or implying or expressing concerns about—that part of the cult was about immigration-related issues—or was it that they were just supporting cult members in remaining in Australia longer?


**Gloria:** They are supporting cult members, especially those in leadership positions, to remain in Australia longer.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Okay. And the arranged marriages that you refer to—arranged marriages are not unlawful in Australia. They are certainly permitted, as long as there is sufficient documentation to demonstrate that you have a commitment to that person that meets the guidelines of immigration. So when you saw arranged marriages, were the people involved in them agreeable to them, and were they living like a married couple, or was it just on paper?

**Gloria:** It really depends, case to case. Some people just married on paper only, while some people eventually grew love out of it. So it really depends, case to case.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Gloria:** I have something to add as well. There is also stalking going on within SCJ members, especially towards people who left SCJ that are potentially going to expose them. I heard about this from someone—I mean, she is already out now—because she used to be tasked to stalk someone, to follow someone, basically, physically wherever they go, yes.



**The CHAIR:** Annabelle, you have got a couple more questions.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** I do have a couple of questions, Gloria. You mentioned about allegations that the cult might be breaking laws in Korea. Even if it is a question on notice, would you mind providing us with information about those laws that you believe might be broken through the SCJ?

**Gloria:** For example, in Korea, you are not allowed to direct traffic, right, at all—unless it is the police. However, Shincheonji directed traffic itself because Lee Man-hee, who is Shincheonji's leader, wants to feel special, like a president—to have, like, a convoy, basically, wherever he goes. They got fined for this in Korea, and there is a legal case going on I think here.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** So the laws were broken in Korea? It is not necessarily the cult structure that is illegal?

**Gloria:** No.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Okay. I think listening to your story and understanding it, one of our challenges is a lot of this is adult consenting behaviour. Where do you feel it breaches that? Where do you think the grey area is where it goes into criminal or potentially—I do not know what I am trying to explain, sorry—I guess, where is the grey area of this behaviour?

**Gloria:** I would say the coercion part is such a grey area, because they will encourage publicly, let us say, for example, people to do their job, people to do their uni. However, at the same time there is a KPI that you need to meet, for example, for evangelism, and if you do not meet it, you are getting scolded for that. Same goes with attending an education or indoctrination session. You must attend that—otherwise, again, you will get scolded for that. So when someone, let us say, for example, fails their uni because of that, they will say, 'Oh, it is the person's problem. Why can't they manage their time better?' But in reality, most people in SCJ are sleep deprived because there is not much time that they have on hand, balancing between real life and Shincheonji work. I personally was only sleeping three hours a day. Five hours is a luxury. Yes, imagine, like, a

6 am meeting and 12 am meeting. So I probably get home at, like, 1 or 2 and then have to wake up very early to attend their meetings in the morning, otherwise I will get scolded.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** So I just am understanding what impact this has had on your life. Has it continued to have an impact on, like, your recovery leaving?

**Gloria:** I would say, speaking from general ex-members, trust issues are a big thing with ex-members, because inside the cult you could not trust anyone because someone could have been snitching on you and you got kicked out and then you lost your community support.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** So it is that level of control over your life.

**Gloria:** That is right. Yes.

**Annabelle CLEELAND:** Thank you so much, Gloria.

**The CHAIR:** Christine.

**Chris COUZENS:** In one of your answers earlier, you mentioned the SCJ desire to have free labour. What does that actually mean? Are there people that are employed?

**Gloria:** There are people that are employed in SCJ. However, I heard from another member that some people did get paid cash in hand, but only like \$300 per month from what I know. It is like an allowance for people who are completely, fully working for Shincheonji. They are living in a communal house, let us say a two-bedroom apartment with six people inside to make the rent cheaper, because obviously they do not have money anymore. So most of these people are living below the poverty line, far below the poverty line I would say. I also witnessed a lot of people getting sick from their involvement in SCJ. A lot of young people basically caught mental health issues like, because of this.

**Chris COUZENS:** So how many people do you think are being paid through the organisation?

**Gloria:** I think less than a quarter of them, not many. And then it is not even being publicly discussed outside, so it is just gossip from people who are getting paid, like they say, 'Oh, I am getting paid' like that.

**Chris COUZENS:** Okay. So do you think it is just cash in hand sort of?

**Gloria:** Cash in hand, I believe, yes.

**Chris COUZENS:** Okay. So there are no official employees –

**Gloria:** No.

**Chris COUZENS:** that you are aware of. Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. One of the areas we are really interested in is understanding what support is available for people who are leaving cults and higher control organisations and what more the Victorian Government can do to better support people. Are you able to reflect on what tools and supports the Victorian Government could offer to those who are leaving or attempting to leave an organisation like SCJ or another high-control group?

**Gloria:** I would say financial support is basically a big thing because obviously, like I said before, a lot of people are living below poverty. I know a lot of people that are inside cannot leave because their community is all within Shincheonji and also they do not have money to rent an apartment or do not have a good track record of renting a place. When I first left as well, I did not have a good track record of renting a place because I was living with another Shincheonji member off record, so it was kind of hard for me to find rentals.

**The CHAIR:** And when you have SCJ helping its members find rentals and maybe paying lower than market rates because lots of people are living together, do you see that as a way SCJ is trying to financially control its members?

**Gloria:** That is right, yes. And also sometimes, I would say like once in every few years, they do a massive donation. What I call a massive donation is that each member has to donate—last time it was \$3,500. They said that this was to build a temple, but there is no temple being built in Melbourne; they have just been renting so far. So I am guessing that it is probably for Korea.

**The CHAIR:** Okay.

**Gloria:** And then everyone had to sign an agreement that they have to pay monthly for a certain time until it reaches \$3,500.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. And what would happen if someone did not pay that payment each month? What would happen to that person?

**Gloria:** I believe that there is a lot of gaslighting going on, because I have a friend that experienced that personally.

**The CHAIR:** Just going back to supports for people who are thinking about leaving or who are leaving a group like this, do you think there is additional support needed for international students who might not have any family members in Australia?

**Gloria:** I would say housing is the main thing. And also community, because these people do not have anyone outside of Australia and they feel isolated. Especially for me—when I left, I was feeling super isolated because I had no-one outside of the cult.

**The CHAIR:** Just finally, Gloria, what outcomes would you like to see the Victorian Government achieve from this inquiry?

**Gloria:** I would say to define what is a cult better, and also to bring those people who are committing a lot of crimes to account. I also forgot to mention that there is physical abuse going on inside, but this is obviously off record without cameras on. I heard from old members who were already inside, when they are coming late to a meeting or they did not meet a KPI, they had to run 10 times around a courtyard—a tennis court, for example—or they had to do planking for like one hour. It could be physical abuse. There was one member that I was talking to who was dozing off in a meeting and then the leader at the time [REDACTED] kicked her in the stomach.

**The CHAIR:** Gloria, before we finish up, is there anything else that you would like to add today?

**Gloria:** That is all, I think, that I have.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for coming and speaking to the Committee today and for sharing your experiences. We are greatly appreciative of the time and effort that you have taken to prepare your evidence, and we acknowledge the incredible significance of the evidence that you have provided today. Thank you very much.

You will be provided with a proof version of today's transcript to check, together with any questions taken on notice. The secretariat will work with you on the publishing options for the transcript, and we will make sure that you are comfortable with the final result. We will adjourn this meeting here. Thanks again.

**Witness withdrew.**