

sub no. 259

WINGS (Inc)

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The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Sir/Madam,

Ref: Submission for an inquiry into the abuse of children whilst in care

My name is Mary Pritchett and I am Co-Ordinator of W.I.N.G.S., a self-funded support group that has been operating for five years. Our aim is to support children and adults who have been sexually, physically and or emotionally abused, whilst in institutional or non-institutional agencies. I network with other support groups such as S.T.A.M.P. which is co-ordinated by Mrs. Janet Lowe and F.S.V.P. co-ordinated by Mrs. Anne Ellis. All of these groups have been operating for a number of years, and all deal with similar issues. Some of the people whose case histories are included in this submission would also like the opportunity to meet with the committee.

The need for a Senate Inquiry into the abuse of children whilst in care has been critical for almost thirty years. Abuse is not new, the only real difference is the age and name of the victims. Shockingly many of the perpetrators of the abuse are still employed within the system. Their positions have become safer and in some cases, more high profile. They have in many ways become more brazen. It is almost impossible to make allegations against anyone in certain areas as the level of protection that they enjoy means that no action will ever be taken.

We would very much like to have the opportunity of meeting with the Board of Inquiry. It is my intention to submit to the Inquiry a number of separate case histories.

On the following pages you will read some case histories. Most of these are simply beyond belief. Even worse, it is still happening. There should be criminal charges arising from the evidence in these documents. The destruction of children's lives and the betrayal of the agency paid to protect them amounts to crimes against humanity. Many of these people still work in the welfare/ child protection agency. They should be exposed and fired, if not charged, that would be a message to others that they are not infallible and perhaps they will re evaluate the way they handle their case inquiries. There needs to be a retraining process, for so many caseworkers to think and act in a way so contrary to child protection, something is wrong with the training processes. There needs to be a whole new structure. The tall poppies definitely need to fall and people with integrity and honesty should replace them.

Currently, when children in care make an allegation of abuse they are questioned by their Case Worker. Unfortunately this questioning is often done in the presence of the abuser, the Foster Parent, or even (as is sometimes the case) the Case Worker themselves is the perpetrator. An Independent person who has no affiliation with the Department, accompanied by a police officer needs to be made available to the victim. The child is already traumatised and allowing their possible abuser to be present, simply adds to the abuse and does not allow the child to speak through fear. The interview should be recorded on video so that it can be used in evidence should there be a Trial.

Another area of concern is what happens to the child when they are 'released' by the system. There is provision within the Departmental Regulations that these children should be assisted with accommodation, furniture and white goods and tertiary education. This, needless to say, does NOT happen. The children, some of whom are only 16 years old, are left on their own, no jobs, no accommodation, no education and no family. They are not told of their entitlements, with many ending up on the streets, simply having nowhere else to go.

One thing that is common to all victims of care and protection is the feeling of worthlessness that is imparted to them by carers. Constant put downs, belittling, and leaving the children with a sense that nobody cares about them, and they are alone in the world, and automatically considered to be a liar. Of course this is not all carers, there are many that are good, kind people. However far too many answer to the description above. These are situations that should be far more closely monitored. To quote Lee Gill 'if people knew you came from the Bridgewater home, you were fair game to be abused'. To quote Marie Stephens 'you were made to feel like shit'.

In order to stem paedophile activity there needs to be far more serious consequences to the offenders. Within the Court process, this crime is not treated as a serious offence. Even repeat offenders often get no more than a "tap on the wrist" or at worst a suspended sentence. Like mandatory reporting, I believe that there should also be mandatory sentencing. The law does have very heavy sentencing capabilities, however these are seldom handed down in judgement. Statistically it has been proven that very few paedophiles can be rehabilitated. Like alcohol or drug addiction, pedophilia is a lifelong problem. The only deterrent for the paedophile is to refrain from being involved with children.

Statistics state that up to 10 percent of victims will in turn become offenders, and that each paedophile has the capacity of abusing hundreds of children. This clearly shows that the problem of pedophilia can and has compounded out of control. Attached is a newspaper article that attributes many suicides to sexual abuse.

I believe mandatory reporting is essential. This state refuses to legislate mandatory reporting and as a result paedophiles are just recycled. This is especially prevalent in the Education Department. In my submission Swan Christian College you will see a prime example that illustrates the necessity of mandatory reporting. This must include the private school system as well as the public and all government agencies. The penalty for non-disclosure should be severe enough to discourage passing paedophiles from one school and one agency to another.

Any investigation or inquiry into the operations of this and other departments needs to be strictly independent of the departments themselves. The fox investigating the fox is always going to find that the fox acted appropriately. History has shown that when investigations are called they are done by the people accused or those that would be in a position to cover up the truth.

It is my belief from interviews with several victims of abuse in care that there is a paedophile network operating through the child protection industry. Children who no longer have parental supervision are being handed to paedophiles for sexual purposes, photographed and filmed for pornography. I believe that there is another purpose for this exploitation of children, and that is to create a compromising situation for people who hold influence in the community, that being political, business, and financial, thus establishing a scenario where strings are pulled to advantage.

Any man or woman that become aware of the extent to which children are being violated and exploited and do nothing about it are guilty of complicity, and an accomplice to the crime. "EVIL ABOUNDS WHEN GOOD MEN DO NOTHING."

The cost to the family structure, which is the corner stone of Society, is huge. The cost to the taxpayer is huge. The cost to the preservation of life is huge. Many of the victims have suicided, unable to deal with their pain. Many are on drugs and prostituting to support their habit. I know that girls are approached when leaving care to work as prostitutes, the girls leaving Nyandi were prime targets. So many spend most of their lives in jail. Broken relationships and the inability to be effective parents result in the next generation of children in care. The financial cost as far as Courts and Lawyers, Prison facilities and Social workers, Support agencies is beyond comprehension. I am sure it would be far cheaper to end and prevent this exploitation of children than it is to allow it to continue.

As for those that have already been victimised I believe the State needs to take responsibility for its negligence, and lack of duty of care. The situation that exists now leaves the victim totally dis-empowered. They are unable to get the police to lay charges or take statements on their abuser. Many of them hold The Department just as guilty as the abusers themselves for putting them in that situation and leaving them in that situation when their expectation was to be protected. I believe that for people to heal and move on with their lives, it is necessary that their abuse is believed and acknowledged. I also believe they have the right to assistance, financial and psychological, as most of these people are left disadvantaged by their abuse. The current law in WA as I understand it, was legislated in such a way that a victim has no way of taking action due to the statute of time limitations that states they have a very short time in order to instigate legal proceedings. We can assume most of these people in care and protection are children and in most cases that would mean they have to instigate legal proceedings while still a child. It is usual for victims of child abuse to come to a place of wanting to deal with their abuse once they hit their twenties and thirties. By this time it is too late. In other states it is possible to go to court and get an extension of time, but this is not possible in WA. Because of this legal situation the full extent of these crimes will not be reflected in the statistics. In the interest of human rights, this legislation needs to change.

If you take the time to read through the documentation presented, I am sure you will be left in no doubt as to the validity of my statements. I have endeavored to give enough documentation to prove the abuse that is operating through the Department for care and protection and employees, however there is a large amount of documents that are not included in this submission as I have tried not to overload.

Something radical needs to happen. I appeal to you to take control of the carnage, or this State will go down in History as PAEDOPHILES PARADISE.

Yours sincerely



Mary Pritchett
CoOrdinator
August, 2003