

25

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs
References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

30/07/03

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Pamela Gordon. Please find attached my submission to the Senate Inquiry.

I authorise the committee to use my submission for publication and if the committee come to Brisbane I would be willing to give verbal evidence.

Yours Sincerely,

P. Gordon

Pam Gordon



To Whom It May Concern

My name is Margaret Watkins. I hold a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Queensland conferred in 1983. Since that time I have been employed in Families, Youth and Community Care (Queensland) working in the area of Child Protection. Additionally, I have worked with adults who have experienced institutional abuse as children in a number of capacities. These include, taking statements of accounts of abuse from ex-residents, as well as providing counselling, support and referrals as required while employed by the Children's Commission; providing counselling and support services while employed by the interim Counselling and Support Service set up in response to the Forde Inquiry and responding to clients of the Aftercare Resource Centre auspiced by Relationships Australia.

I had a number of sessions with Pamela Gordon over a six month period as well as some sessions with Pamela's extended family members. Pamela outlined a childhood history of severe, prolonged sexual and physical abuse by her mother's partner, from the age of four to eleven years of age. She also referred to institutional abuse in a number of different institutions in which she was subsequently placed.

The sexual abuse referred to, ceased when Pamela's mother became aware of what was occurring and took her daughters and left the abuser's home. Pamela, freed from his torment and threats, at last felt able to express some of her confusion, loss, and pain. This behaviour was interpreted as misbehaviour and was responded to accordingly. Instead of receiving the therapy and support that she required to begin to address the trauma of those years, Pamela instead was placed away from home.

There were many placements Tufnell, Kalimna, Warilda, Mt. Maria, Karrala, Chermside Psychiatric Hospital and finally Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Centre. Pamela discussed the effects for her placement in these particular facilities including her placement at Kalimna when she was twelve years of age. Of particular relevance for Pamela is the practice of isolation that was used at Kalimna while she was there. Pamela describes that immediately on arrival at Kalimna she was placed in solitary for a period of two weeks. At a time when she was most in need of understanding and compassion as well as assistance to deal with her childhood abuse she was instead left alone with her "own thoughts" for protracted periods of time. Pamela believes she was at Kalimna for a period of four months, although the records indicate a three month period. Pamela states that she was in solitary for most of the time that she was there.

This experience of isolation at a time when Pamela already felt alone and separate from others, as well as feeling in some way responsible for the abuse inflicted on her only served to exacerbate her sense of separateness, hopelessness and responsibility. Pamela believes this time at Kalimna and the treatment she experienced there has contributed significantly to her feelings that her needs would not be considered and the help she was so entitled to would not be forth coming. Pamela's subsequent difficulties in adult hood she attributes to past abuse and past systems responses that served to ignore her complex needs. Pamela's opinion is that the practice of isolation

so common at Kalimna contributed significantly to her mental health issues in adulthood.

Pamela was in need of support, guidance, compassion, and understanding. She required the opportunity to disclose the abuse that had been her experience for so many years; she required acknowledgment that she had been traumatised for much of her childhood ; she required a therapeutic response that addressed her individual needs and she required a nurturing environment that treated her with respect and dignity. The practices outlined by Pamela as her experience at Kalimna not only did not address her needs but served instead to traumatise her further.

If I can provide any further information please contact me on

Margaret Watkins