

# FINAL REPORT

Private sessions



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

VOLUME 5

ISBN 978-1-925622-46-1

© Commonwealth of Australia 2017

All material presented in this publication is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Australia licence ([www.creativecommons.org/licenses](http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses)).

For the avoidance of doubt, this means this licence only applies to material as set out in this document.



The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website as is the full legal code for the CC BY 4.0 AU licence ([www.creativecommons.org/licenses](http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses)).

#### [Contact us](#)

Enquiries regarding the licence and any use of this document are welcome at:

Attorney-General's Department  
3-5 National Circuit  
Barton, ACT 2600

Email: [copyright@ag.gov.au](mailto:copyright@ag.gov.au)

# FINAL REPORT

Volume 5

Private sessions

## Content warning

This volume contains information about child sexual abuse that may be distressing. We also wish to advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that information in this volume may have been provided by or refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have died.

# Table of contents

Preface	1
The Royal Commission	1
Public hearings	1
Private sessions	2
Policy and research	3
Community engagement	3
Diversity and vulnerability	3
Our interim and other reports	4
Definition of terms	4
Naming conventions	5
Structure of the Final Report	5
Summary	9
Themes from private sessions	10
Children and young people	14
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors	16
Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds	19
Survivors with disability at the time of abuse	21
Survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session	23
Survivors' suggestions for change	25
1 Introduction	27
1.1 Overview	27
1.2 Terms of Reference	28
1.3 Links with other volumes	29
1.4 Limitations of our work	30
1.5 Key terms	30
1.6 Structure of this volume	32
2 The Royal Commission and private sessions	33
2.1 Overview	33
2.2 The private sessions model	34
2.3 Adapting private sessions	38
2.4 Managing private sessions information	47
2.5 Written accounts	49
2.6 Number and location of private sessions	50

3	Themes from private sessions	51
3.1	Overview	51
3.2	Profile of survivors who attended private sessions	53
3.3	Experiences of abuse	54
3.4	Circumstances at the time of abuse	68
3.5	Experiences of disclosure	76
3.6	Wellbeing	83
4	Children and young people	95
4.1	Overview	95
4.2	Profile of children and young people	95
4.3	Experiences of abuse	96
4.4	Circumstances at the time of abuse	101
4.5	Experiences of disclosure	107
4.6	Wellbeing	114
5	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors	122
5.1	Overview	122
5.2	Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors	126
5.3	Experiences of abuse	127
5.4	Circumstances at the time of abuse	136
5.5	Experiences of disclosure	152
5.6	Wellbeing	163
6	Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds	175
6.1	Overview	175
6.2	Profile of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds	176
6.3	Experiences of abuse	177
6.4	Circumstances at the time of abuse	183
6.5	Experiences of disclosure	188
6.6	Wellbeing	197
7	Survivors with disability	205
7.1	Overview	205
7.2	Profile of survivors with disability	206
7.3	Experiences of abuse	207
7.4	Circumstances at the time of abuse	213
7.5	Experiences of disclosure	219
7.6	Wellbeing	231

8	Survivors in prison at the time of the private session	240
8.1	Overview	240
8.2	Profile of survivors in prison	241
8.3	Experiences of abuse	241
8.4	Circumstances at the time of abuse	247
8.5	Experiences of disclosure	257
8.6	Wellbeing	268
9	Survivors' suggestions for change	285
9.1	Overview	285
9.2	Learning from survivors' knowledge and experience	285
9.3	Preventing child sexual abuse	286
9.4	Responding to child sexual abuse	293
9.5	Supporting victims and survivors	299
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Private sessions narratives online</b>	
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>knowmore brochure</b>	<b>304</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>knowmore brochure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Registration confirmation thank you letter</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>Confirmation of private session letter</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>Appendix E</b>	<b>Sharing your story: A guide to your private session</b>	<b>312</b>
<b>Appendix F</b>	<b>Practice Guideline 3: Guide questions for providing a statement or information to the Royal Commission</b>	<b>328</b>
<b>Appendix G</b>	<b>Authorisation to be at private session</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>Appendix H</b>	<b>After sharing your story</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>Appendix I</b>	<b>Procedures for engagement and support of children and young people in private sessions</b>	<b>344</b>
<b>Appendix J</b>	<b>Checklist: Private sessions with children</b>	<b>353</b>
<b>Appendix K</b>	<b>Share your story: Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</b>	<b>354</b>
<b>Appendix L</b>	<b>The narrative writing process</b>	<b>355</b>
<b>Appendix M</b>	<b>Sharing your story: A guide to your written account</b>	<b>357</b>
<b>Appendix N</b>	<b>Quantitative information for all survivors</b>	<b>373</b>
<b>Appendix O</b>	<b>Quantitative information for children and young people</b>	<b>385</b>
<b>Appendix P</b>	<b>Quantitative information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors</b>	<b>396</b>
<b>Appendix Q</b>	<b>Quantitative information for survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds</b>	<b>407</b>
<b>Appendix R</b>	<b>Quantitative information for survivors with disability at the time of the abuse</b>	<b>418</b>
<b>Appendix S</b>	<b>Quantitative information for survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session</b>	<b>430</b>
	<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>441</b>





# Preface

## The Royal Commission

---

The Letters Patent provided to the Royal Commission required that it ‘inquire into institutional responses to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and related matters’. In carrying out this task, the Royal Commission was directed to focus on systemic issues, be informed by an understanding of individual cases, and make findings and recommendations to better protect children against sexual abuse and alleviate the impact of abuse on children when it occurs. The Royal Commission did this by conducting public hearings, private sessions and a policy and research program.

## Public hearings

---

A Royal Commission commonly does its work through public hearings. We were aware that sexual abuse of children has occurred in many institutions, all of which could be investigated in a public hearing. However, if the Royal Commission was to attempt that task, a great many resources would need to be applied over an indeterminate, but lengthy, period of time. For this reason the Commissioners accepted criteria by which Senior Counsel Assisting would identify appropriate matters for a public hearing and bring them forward as individual ‘case studies’.

The decision to conduct a case study was informed by whether or not the hearing would advance an understanding of systemic issues and provide an opportunity to learn from previous mistakes so that any findings and recommendations for future change the Royal Commission made would have a secure foundation. In some cases the relevance of the lessons to be learned will be confined to the institution the subject of the hearing. In other cases they will have relevance to many similar institutions in different parts of Australia.

Public hearings were also held to assist in understanding the extent of abuse that may have occurred in particular institutions or types of institutions. This enabled the Royal Commission to understand the ways in which various institutions were managed and how they responded to allegations of child sexual abuse. Where our investigations identified a significant concentration of abuse in one institution, the matter could be brought forward to a public hearing.

Public hearings were also held to tell the stories of some individuals, which assisted in a public understanding of the nature of sexual abuse, the circumstances in which it may occur and, most importantly, the devastating impact that it can have on people’s lives. Public hearings were open to the media and the public, and were live streamed on the Royal Commission’s website.

The Commissioners' findings from each hearing were generally set out in a case study report. Each report was submitted to the Governor-General and the governors and administrators of each state and territory and, where appropriate, tabled in the Australian Parliament and made publicly available. The Commissioners recommended some case study reports not be tabled at the time because of current or prospective criminal proceedings.

We also conducted some private hearings, which aided the Royal Commission's investigative processes.

## Private sessions

---

When the Royal Commission was appointed, it was apparent to the Australian Government that many people (possibly thousands) would wish to tell us about their personal history of sexual abuse as a child in an institutional setting. As a result, the Australian Parliament amended the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) to create a process called a 'private session'.

Each private session was conducted by one or two Commissioners and was an opportunity for a person to tell their story of abuse in a protected and supportive environment. Many accounts from these sessions are told in a de-identified form in this Final Report.

Written accounts allowed individuals who did not attend private sessions to share their experiences with Commissioners. The experiences of survivors described to us in written accounts have informed this Final Report in the same manner as those shared with us in private sessions.

We also decided to publish, with their consent, as many individual survivors' experiences as possible, as de-identified narratives drawn from private sessions and written accounts. These narratives are presented as accounts of events as told by survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions. We hope that by sharing them with the public they will contribute to a better understanding of the profound impact of child sexual abuse and may help to make our institutions as safe as possible for children in the future. The narratives are available as an online appendix to Volume 5, *Private sessions*.

We recognise that the information gathered in private sessions and from written accounts captures the accounts of survivors of child sexual abuse who were able to share their experiences in these ways. We do not know how well the experiences of these survivors reflect those of other victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who could not or did not attend a private session or provide a written account.

## Policy and research

---

The Royal Commission had an extensive policy and research program that drew upon the findings made in public hearings and upon survivors' private sessions and written accounts, as well as generating new research evidence.

The Royal Commission used issues papers, roundtables and consultation papers to consult with government and non-government representatives, survivors, institutions, regulators, policy and other experts, academics, and survivor advocacy and support groups. The broader community had an opportunity to contribute to our consideration of systemic issues and our responses through our public consultation processes.

## Community engagement

---

The community engagement component of the Royal Commission's inquiry ensured that people in all parts of Australia were offered the opportunity to articulate their experiences and views. It raised awareness of our work and allowed a broad range of people to engage with us.

We involved the general community in our work in several ways. We held public forums and private meetings with survivor groups, institutions, community organisations and service providers. We met with children and young people, people with disability and their advocates, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We also engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in many parts of Australia, and with regional and remote communities.

## Diversity and vulnerability

---

We heard from a wide range of people throughout the inquiry. The victims and survivors who came forward were from diverse backgrounds and had many different experiences. Factors such as gender, age, education, culture, sexuality or disability had affected their vulnerability and the institutional responses to the abuse. Certain types of institutional cultures and settings created heightened risks, and some children's lives brought them into contact with these institutions more than others.

While not inevitably more vulnerable to child sexual abuse, we heard that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were more likely to encounter circumstances that increased their risk of abuse in institutions, reduced their ability to disclose or report abuse and, if they did disclose or report, reduced their chances of receiving an adequate response.

We examined key concerns related to disability, cultural diversity and the unique context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience, as part of our broader effort to understand what informs best practice institutional responses. We included discussion about these and other issues of heightened vulnerability in every volume. Volume 5, *Private sessions* outlines what we heard in private sessions from these specific populations.

## Our interim and other reports

---

On 30 June 2014, in line with our Terms of Reference, we submitted a two-volume interim report of the results of the inquiry. Volume 1 described the work we had done, the issues we were examining and the work we still needed to do. Volume 2 contained a representative sample of 150 de-identified personal stories from people who had shared their experiences at a private session.

Early in the inquiry it became apparent that some issues should be reported on before the inquiry was complete to give survivors and institutions more certainty on these issues and enable governments and institutions to implement our recommendations as soon as possible. Consequently, we submitted the following reports:

- *Working With Children Checks* (August 2015)
- *Redress and civil litigation* (September 2015)
- *Criminal justice* (August 2017)

## Definition of terms

---

The inappropriate use of words to describe child sexual abuse and the people who experience the abuse can have silencing, stigmatising and other harmful effects. Conversely, the appropriate use of words can empower and educate.

For these reasons, we have taken care with the words used in this report. Some key terms used in this volume are set out in Chapter 1, 'Introduction' and in the Final Report Glossary, in Volume 1, *Our inquiry*.

## Naming conventions

---

To protect the identity of victims and survivors and their supporters who participated in private sessions, pseudonyms are used. These pseudonyms are indicated by the use of single inverted commas, for example, ‘Roy’.

As in our case study reports, the identities of some witnesses before public hearings and other persons referred to in the proceedings are protected through the use of assigned initials, for example, BZW.

## Structure of the Final Report

---

The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse consists of 17 volumes and an executive summary. To meet the needs of readers with specific interests, each volume can be read in isolation. The volumes contain cross references to enable readers to understand individual volumes in the context of the whole report.

In the Final Report:

The **Executive Summary** summarises the entire report and provides a full list of recommendations.

**Volume 1, *Our inquiry*** introduces the Final Report, describing the establishment, scope and operations of the Royal Commission.

**Volume 2, *Nature and cause*** details the nature and cause of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. It also describes what is known about the extent of child sexual abuse and the limitations of existing studies. The volume discusses factors that affect the risk of child sexual abuse in institutions and the legal and political changes that have influenced how children have interacted with institutions over time.

**Volume 3, *Impacts*** details the impacts of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. The volume discusses how impacts can extend beyond survivors, to family members, friends, and whole communities. The volume also outlines the impacts of institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

**Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse*** describes what we have learned about survivors’ experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse and about the factors that affect a victim’s decision whether to disclose, when to disclose and who to tell.

**Volume 5, *Private sessions*** provides an analysis of survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse as told to Commissioners during private sessions, structured around four key themes: experiences of abuse; circumstances at the time of the abuse; experiences of disclosure; and impact on wellbeing. It also describes the private sessions model, including how we adapted it to meet the needs of diverse and vulnerable groups.

**Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe*** looks at the role community prevention could play in making communities and institutions child safe, the child safe standards that will make institutions safer for children, and how regulatory oversight and practice could be improved to facilitate the implementation of these standards in institutions. It also examines how to prevent and respond to online sexual abuse in institutions in order to create child safe online environments.

**Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting*** examines the reporting of child sexual abuse to external government authorities by institutions and their staff and volunteers, and how institutions have responded to complaints of child sexual abuse. It outlines guidance for how institutions should handle complaints, and the need for independent oversight of complaint handling by institutions.

**Volume 8, *Recordkeeping and information sharing*** examines records and recordkeeping by institutions that care for or provide services to children; and information sharing between institutions with responsibilities for children's safety and wellbeing and between those institutions and relevant professionals. It makes recommendations to improve records and recordkeeping practices within institutions and information sharing between key agencies and institutions.

**Volume 9, *Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services*** examines what we learned about the advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment service needs of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, and outlines recommendations for improving service systems to better respond to those needs and assist survivors towards recovery.

**Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours*** examines what we learned about institutional responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours. It discusses the nature and extent of these behaviours and the factors that may contribute to children sexually abusing other children. The volume then outlines how governments and institutions should improve their responses and makes recommendations about improving prevention and increasing the range of interventions available for children with harmful sexual behaviours.

**Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*** examines what we learned about survivors' experiences of, and institutional responses to, child sexual abuse in residential institutions such as children's homes, missions, reformatories and hospitals during the period spanning post-World War II to 1990.

**Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care*** examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care. The volume examines the nature and adequacy of institutional responses and draws out common failings. It makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in out-of-home care and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses.

**Volume 13, *Schools*** examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in schools. The volume examines the nature and adequacy of institutional responses and draws out the contributing factors to child sexual abuse in schools. It makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in schools and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses to that abuse.

**Volume 14, *Sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups*** examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in sport and recreation contexts. The volume examines the nature and adequacy of institutional responses and draws out common failings. It makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in sport and recreation and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses.

**Volume 15, *Contemporary detention environments*** examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary detention environments, focusing on youth detention and immigration detention. It recognises that children are generally safer in community settings than in closed detention. It also makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in detention environments and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses.

**Volume 16, *Religious institutions*** examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in religious institutions. The volume discusses the nature and extent of child sexual abuse in religious institutions, the impacts of this abuse, and survivors' experiences of disclosing it. The volume examines the nature and adequacy of institutional responses to child sexual abuse in religious institutions, and draws out common factors contributing to the abuse and common failings in institutional responses. It makes recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in religious institutions and, where it does occur, to help ensure effective responses.

**Volume 17, *Beyond the Royal Commission*** describes the impacts and legacy of the Royal Commission and discusses monitoring and reporting on the implementation of our recommendations.

Unless otherwise indicated, this Final Report is based on laws, policies and information current as at 30 June 2017. Private sessions quantitative information is current as at 31 May 2017.





# Summary

When the Royal Commission was appointed, the Australian Government recognised that many people would want to share their history of institutional child sexual abuse, but to do so in a private, protected and supportive environment. As a result, the Australian Parliament amended the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) to create the ‘private session’ process.

Participation in private sessions was voluntary. A person who appeared at a private session was not a witness or considered to be giving evidence.<sup>1</sup> Hearing survivors’ experiences of abuse in private sessions informed our understanding of the nature and extent of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, the circumstances in which it can occur and the devastating impact it can have on the lives of those affected. Information provided in private sessions has been used throughout the Final Report in a de-identified manner.

The private sessions model was carefully designed using trauma-informed principles. We wanted to do everything we could to be sensitive to the diverse, far-reaching and ongoing impacts of childhood trauma on survivors. We endeavoured to engage survivors in ways that affirmed their experiences. The private sessions model was designed to be flexible and responsive to the diversity of survivors’ needs and capacities.

This volume describes the experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts who came forward and told their stories to Commissioners during a private session. Following an exploration of the experiences of all survivors, this volume also considers the specific experiences of:

- children and young people under the age of 25 at the time of the private session
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors
- survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- survivors with disability at the time of the abuse
- survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session.

Over one in three survivors who attended a private session were adults who described sexual abuse in historical residential institutions. They included Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and members of the Stolen Generations. Although the experiences of many of these survivors are included throughout this volume, the specific experiences of survivors of historical residential institutions are explored in detail in Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*.

Over half of survivors in private sessions told Commissioners they were sexually abused in institutions managed by religious organisations. Although the experiences of many of these survivors are also included throughout this volume, the nature of these institutions and the specific experiences of survivors who described abuse in these institutions are examined in detail in Volume 16, *Religious institutions*.

In contrast to many other volumes, we do not make any recommendations in Volume 5. Our purpose is to give an account of some of the common themes that emerged as survivors shared their experiences of child sexual abuse with Commissioners.

We acknowledge the courage of all the survivors who came forward and shared their experiences with us, and the valuable contribution they have made to our work.

## Themes from private sessions

---

Between May 2013 and May 2017, 6,875 people came forward and told their stories of sexual abuse in an institution to one or more Commissioners during a private session. We expect to have held approximately 8,000 private sessions at the completion of the inquiry. Information from private sessions was captured in a number of ways, including:

- narratives, which condensed each survivor's story into a brief de-identified narrative format that could be read by others
- a form that captured information relating to each survivor's demographic profile and their experience of child sexual abuse in quantitative format.

Royal Commission researchers analysed the quantitative and qualitative information from private sessions and a sample of narratives to identify themes from private sessions. The themes described in this volume reflect what survivors told the Commissioners. We do not know how well the themes reflect the experiences of survivors who did not attend a private session.

Analysis of quantitative information from survivors in private sessions who provided the relevant information showed:

- Survivors who participated in private sessions were most often male (64.3 per cent) and aged over 50 (57.4 per cent) at the time of the private session. Only a small proportion (6.3 per cent) were aged under 30. A substantial minority (14.3 per cent) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors. Only a small proportion of survivors were from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds (3.1 per cent) or were children with disability at the time of the sexual abuse (4.3 per cent). More than one in 10 survivors (10.4 per cent) participated in their private session while they were in prison.
- On average, females were younger than males when the sexual abuse started (9.7 years compared with 10.8 years, respectively). Most survivors (85.0 per cent) experienced multiple episodes of child sexual abuse, and one-third (36.4 per cent) said they were sexually abused for between two and five years.

- Survivors rarely described being subjected to just one type of sexual abuse. Most said they experienced non-penetrative contact sexual abuse (72.6 per cent), such as someone touching their body in a sexual way, or being forced to touch someone else's body. Over half said they experienced sexual abuse with penetration (55.5 per cent). Others reported having their privacy violated (23.9 per cent) or being groomed for sexual contact (22.8 per cent). Grooming often occurred over an extended period of time to normalise the extra attention the perpetrator was showing the child and to gain their trust. Some perpetrators groomed the victim's parents, especially when they lived with or had close contact with the victim's family, or held a position of trust in the institution.
- Most survivors also said they experienced other abuse in the lead up to, during and/or after the child sexual abuse, such as emotional abuse (80.7 per cent) and/or physical abuse (64.4 per cent).
- Most survivors (93.8 per cent) described being sexually abused by a male, and more than one in 10 (10.9 per cent) said they were abused by a female. Over one-third (36.3 per cent) said they were sexually abused by more than one person.
- Most survivors (83.8 per cent) said they were sexually abused by an adult. Almost one-third (32.2 per cent) said they were abused by a person in religious ministry, and one in five (21.0 per cent) said they were abused by a teacher. Almost one in four survivors (24.4 per cent) said they were sexually abused by another child, often in the context of bullying and harassment.
- More than one in three survivors (36.0 per cent) said they were sexually abused in an historical form of out-of-home care, such as a children's home, mission or reformatory. Just under one-third (31.8 per cent) said they were abused in a school, and 14.5 per cent said they were abused while participating or involved in religious activities, such as attending a church, synagogue or seminary. More than one in five survivors (21.0 per cent) said they were sexually abused in more than one institution.
- The majority of survivors (58.6 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused in an institution managed by a religious organisation. Among these survivors, close to two-thirds (61.8 per cent) said they were abused in an institution managed by the Catholic Church.
- Most survivors described experiencing mental health issues at some point during their life (94.9 per cent). Many also said they experienced relationship issues (67.6 per cent) and poor educational achievement and/or financial hardship (55.7 per cent).

## Circumstances at the time of abuse

Survivors often said that at the time of the abuse, their experience was that children were not highly regarded in society and were generally ignored or looked down upon. They described a social context where children had little value, were voiceless, had few rights, and were not considered worthy of any privacy or respect. This was especially the case for children who were in the 'care' of the state. Survivors described being 'seen and not heard', and that their disclosures of sexual abuse were ignored, disbelieved and dismissed.

Survivors often told Commissioners that institutions were afforded status, respect and power because of their place in society. Many survivors described an institutional culture that normalised abuse. Survivors who spent their childhoods in historical residential institutions often said adults routinely and publicly punished and physically abused children, though sexual abuse was most often conducted in private. Survivors who said they were abused in non-residential and more contemporary institutions more often said that abuse and punishment tended to occur out of sight of others. These cultures of abuse often extended to bullying and harmful sexual behaviours between children.

Many survivors described coming from families where neglect, violence and abuse were common. Some survivors felt this may have increased their vulnerability to sexual abuse in institutional settings, as perpetrators may have targeted them knowing their parents paid little attention to their welfare. Other survivors told Commissioners they came from loving, supportive and open families. Often, these families had a deep trust in and loyalty to the institution where the child was sexually abused. Survivors believed this trust and devotion may have 'blinded' their otherwise loving and supportive parents to recognising the changes in their child's behaviour resulting from the abuse. Many survivors said their family's affiliation with the institution prevented them from disclosing the abuse.

Many survivors believed their lack of understanding about sex and sexuality as a child contributed to them being vulnerable to sexual abuse. They often said they felt confused about what was happening to them and did not understand it as sexual abuse. This was especially the case when perpetrators used grooming tactics to prepare the child for sexual abuse. Other survivors said they were socially isolated and considered 'different' to other children. They often believed perpetrators targeted them because they appeared introverted or withdrawn, knowing they were unlikely to report the abuse.

## Experiences of disclosure

Survivors rarely described disclosing child sexual abuse as a one-off event. Some survivors intentionally disclosed the details of the sexual abuse during childhood or as an adult. Others had the details of the abuse discovered by someone else or only disclosed after they were asked. About one in 10 (10.3 per cent) survivors disclosed for the first time to the Royal Commission.

Responses to childhood disclosures of sexual abuse before 1990 were described as mostly negative. Survivors often said they were not believed by adults within the institution and their parents, or that they were ignored, dismissed, punished or ridiculed. Initial poor responses to a disclosure often had the effect of silencing victims and many took several decades to speak of the abuse again. Survivors who disclosed as an adult often did so after experiencing a ‘trigger’ event, such as seeing the perpetrator on the street or hearing about the institution where the abuse occurred in the media. Survivors described responses to adult disclosures as mixed, with some recipients of the disclosure holding inaccurate and stereotyped views about victims of sexual abuse. Survivors described responses from police in a range of ways, from professional and compassionate to upsetting and invalidating.

Survivors often described the barriers to disclosure as similar for children and adults. Most felt a deep sense of shame and embarrassment about the sexual abuse, which either prevented them from telling others or meant they told only parts of the story. Other barriers to disclosure were felt more acutely during childhood, such as feeling threatened or confused or being punished. Adult survivors who delayed disclosure often said they were not ready to deal with its consequences.

## Wellbeing

The large majority of survivors told Commissioners that child sexual abuse in an institutional context had a lasting, negative effect on their lives. Most commonly, survivors described experiencing episodes of poor mental health such as depression or anxiety. Some (16.4 per cent) reported having attempted suicide and almost one in five (19.8 per cent) spoke about having had thoughts of suicide. Survivors also commonly experienced issues with interpersonal relationships, such as difficulties building and maintaining trust. Many said they had difficulties with physical intimacy and affection. While some had sought solace in spirituality and religion, others – especially those who experienced sexual abuse in a religious setting – felt anger and disillusionment and found it difficult to actively engage with religious institutions as adults. Most survivors said they experienced poor educational outcomes and/or economic insecurity, with many saying they had difficulty concentrating at school and achieved poor grades in the years immediately after being sexually abused.

Survivors described sources of strength and survival that had helped them lead positive, full lives despite experiencing sexual abuse as a child. Many relied upon support from family and friends, and others learned strategies for managing relationships and mental health issues through counselling. Some pursued the perpetrator or institution through legal action or via redress programs, though seeking justice sometimes took a heavy toll. Many survivors said their wellbeing fluctuated over their life course.

## Children and young people

---

Commissioners heard about the experiences of 285 children and young people aged under 25 at the time of their private sessions, representing 4.1 per cent of all survivors. Fewer than half of the children and young people (38.6 per cent) attended in person. Many parents and carers attended to describe their child's experience of abuse. In brief, of the people who provided the relevant information:

- On average, children and young people were aged 9.7 years when they were first sexually abused. The majority said they were sexually abused on multiple occasions (78.0 per cent). Similar proportions said they were abused by a single person (79.3 per cent), and for a duration of one year or less (78.3 per cent).
- Like other survivors, most children and young people told us they experienced non-penetrative contact sexual abuse (56.9 per cent) and/or sexual abuse with penetration (47.7 per cent) in combination with at least one other type of sexual abuse, such as being groomed for sexual contact (20.6 per cent). Like other survivors, children and young people commonly told Commissioners they also experienced emotional (77.5 per cent) and physical abuse (52.3 per cent) before, during or after the child sexual abuse.
- Children and young people most commonly said they were sexually abused by adults including foster carers (27.3 per cent) and teachers (9.8 per cent). A large proportion of children and young people (33.0 per cent) told Commissioners they were abused by another child.
- Over one-third of children and young people (35.4 per cent) said they were sexually abused in contemporary (post-1990) out-of-home care, such as foster care, kinship or relative care or residential care. More than one-quarter (27.4 per cent) said they were abused in a school and 7.7 per cent said they were abused while they participated in a religious activity.

## Circumstances at the time of abuse

Many children and young people believed the general community and institutional leaders had a limited understanding of child sexual abuse and its impact on victims and their parents. They described adults within institutions and the community as holding outdated assumptions about gender and masculinity, which led to them minimising concerns about bullying and abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours.

Like other survivors, children and young people often told Commissioners that institutional authorities prioritised the status and reputation of the institution ahead of children's safety and protection. They also described inadequate monitoring and oversight within institutions, especially in relation to supervising children with a history of violence and/or harmful sexual behaviours. They said the lack of supervision allowed bullying to escalate and for the sexual abuse to go on without the knowledge of adults.

Unlike other survivors, most children and young people described having at least one parent or carer who was responsible for their wellbeing. This was true for children who lived with their parents and for those in out-of-home care. Parents who attended private sessions to tell their children's stories told Commissioners how much they loved their children and how concerned they were for their wellbeing. Many said they tried to protect their children from the sexual abuse, but that out-of-home care providers and government departments failed to act on their warnings. Other parents and carers acknowledged they had been overly trusting of perpetrators or the institution, and that they had misinterpreted perpetrators' grooming behaviours as acts of kindness and generosity.

## Experiences of disclosure

Most children and young people said they initially disclosed to their parents – often immediately or soon after the abuse and sometimes in the context of everyday conversation. Others said the abuse was witnessed by someone else, who then reported it. Children and young people who waited more than one year to disclose often described how they tried to disclose at the time by making partial disclosures. Disclosures were often facilitated by parents and carers paying careful attention to changes in their child's behaviour and noting that something was wrong.

Most children and young people said the person they told about the sexual abuse – often their parent – went on to tell others including the police, welfare agencies or institutional authorities. Many parents and carers told Commissioners they reported the abuse to multiple authorities on multiple occasions. Like other survivors, children and young people often said that institutions became defensive or sought to protect their reputations after receiving allegations of child sexual abuse. This was especially the case for abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours: responses were often dismissive, especially when the child with harmful sexual behaviours had disability.

## Wellbeing

Children and young people often described the immediate effects of experiencing child sexual abuse. Many said they went from being happy or independent children to being frightened, angry and anxious. Some said they started wetting the bed and having nightmares. Some said they became hyper-vigilant and developed behaviours and rituals in an attempt to protect themselves from further abuse or to ease their experience of anxiety. Some had thoughts of suicide or had attempted suicide, or engaged in self-harm. Most said their participation at school was affected in the immediate aftermath of the abuse. For some survivors, their drop in participation was temporary. For others, the effect was more sustained as they left school early or could no longer focus on their education.

Parents and carers described experiencing sleeplessness, anxiety, nightmares and panic attacks after learning that their child had been sexually abused. For some parents, their child's experience triggered memories of their own childhood trauma. Many parents and carers felt guilty or responsible because they had not recognised or had missed warning signs that, if acted upon, may have prevented the abuse. They also described the burden of being responsible for maintaining the wellbeing of the child and simultaneously dealing with dismissive or threatening institutional responses. Other parents and carers said they experienced feelings of rage and anger, which often affected their own intimate relationships.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

---

Commissioners heard from 985 people who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander survivors in private sessions, representing 14.3 per cent of all survivors. In brief, of the people who provided the relevant information:

- On average, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors were aged 9.6 years when they were first sexually abused. The majority said they were sexually abused on multiple occasions (87.1 per cent). Just over half said they were sexually abused by a single person (52.5 per cent), and a similar proportion for a duration of more than one year (52.8 per cent).
- More than two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors experienced non-penetrative contact sexual abuse (67.5 per cent), such as someone touching their body in a sexual way, or being forced to touch someone else's body. The majority (62.8 per cent) said they experienced sexual abuse with penetration. More than three-quarters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors also experienced physical (78.8 per cent) and/or emotional abuse (77.7 per cent) in the lead up to, during or after the child sexual abuse. One-quarter (24.7 per cent) reported neglect.



- Three-quarters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (75.6 per cent) said they were sexually abused by an adult – most commonly a foster carer (23.3 per cent), residential care worker (19.4 per cent) or a person in religious ministry (17.9 per cent). Over one-third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (36.4 per cent) said they were abused by a child with harmful sexual behaviours.
- Three-quarters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (75.0 per cent) said they were sexually abused in out-of-home care, the majority of whom were abused in historical out-of-home care (61.8 per cent), such as a mission or children's home. A total of 15.2 per cent said they were abused in youth detention and one in 10 (10.1 per cent) in a school.

## Historical context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a distinct experience of institutionalisation and abuse in institutions. Multiple national and state inquiries have found the abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a collective experience, with its roots in colonisation and dispossession, disconnection from culture and protectionist and assimilationist policies.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions were forcibly removed from their families under various state and territory placement and restriction legislation, and child protection laws. Others experienced the intergenerational trauma caused by the forced removal of whole families and communities under these racially discriminatory laws. The effects of forced removal are widely acknowledged to be 'far-reaching and complex and often compounded in subsequent generations'.<sup>2</sup>

## Circumstances at the time of abuse

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often talked about the racism and discrimination they experienced within the wider community and within institutions. Some said they were taunted with racist names. Others said they experienced discrimination in less obvious ways, such as by teachers and other students avoiding them at school. Some said they believed perpetrators targeted them because they were socially isolated as a result of the discrimination.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors talked to Commissioners about being members of the Stolen Generations. They described the ongoing trauma they felt after being forcibly removed from their family, culture and land. Some had experienced the forced removal of their own children. Many survivors described coming from loving, supportive families and they could not understand why they had been removed and placed in abusive institutional environments.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors gave accounts of child sexual abuse in historical residential institutions, including missions and reserves. Many survivors said there was little or no effective oversight of management practices in these institutions, which were often violent places that humiliated and undermined their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture. Physical, emotional and sexual violence was normalised: violence between staff and children, and among children, was condoned or ignored. Survivors sexually abused more recently often said they were abused in out-of-home care or in youth detention. Many of these survivors said the institutions had lax policies regulating adults' interactions with children, leaving them vulnerable to abuse.

## Experiences of disclosure

Like other survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often said they tried to disclose the abuse during childhood, but were ignored, dismissed or punished. Disclosure was difficult and sometimes impossible for survivors who lived on missions and reserves as children as there was simply no one to tell. Survivors said they felt powerless in the context of strict institutional hierarchies where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had limited say over their own wellbeing. Survivors abused in foster and kinship care placements told Commissioners they experienced a range of reactions to their disclosures of child sexual abuse, which were often complicated by the recipient of the disclosure being married or related to the alleged perpetrator. Childhood disclosures to police, especially among survivors who had been forcibly removed by police from their families, were often described as a negative and sometimes traumatic process.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors found comfort in disclosing as adults to former residents and survivors from the same institutions. Others found this difficult because it meant coming into contact with adults who, as children, had sexually abused them. Survivors who disclosed as adults to police said that they often did so with hesitation because of their early traumatic memories of removal, though many said the police treated them with respect and kindness and took action to investigate their claims. Survivors who disclosed through redress schemes often said they found the process difficult. Some did not tell their whole story during the redress process because of an ongoing sense of shame, which sometimes meant they received less money than they might have.

## Wellbeing

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors discussed issues related to their wellbeing in the context of the broader trauma associated with being removed from family, country and culture. For many, the trauma of child sexual abuse could not be separated from the intergenerational trauma associated with child removal. Most survivors who had been removed from family felt disconnected from their family, land and culture, and some felt no connection at all with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. Many survivors had experienced suicidal thoughts and some had attempted suicide. Other survivors believed the trauma associated with removal and sexual abuse in institutional settings manifested in relationship difficulties passed from generation to generation. Many survivors described having non-existent or strained relationships with birth parents and siblings, patterns of unhealthy intimate relationships, and difficult relationships with their own children.

Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often pointed to connections with family, community and culture as sources of strength and resilience. Some said they were proud of their achievements at work, and others drew hope and inspiration from watching their children and grandchildren achieve at school and in sport. Survivors often said they found peace and joy during their later years as they became involved with raising their grandchildren. Many older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors said they drew strength from connecting with country and culture in a way that helped bring perspective to their lifetime experiences.

## Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

---

The Royal Commission adopted a broad definition of culturally and linguistically diverse to mean anyone from a cultural or linguistic context different from the dominant Australian culture. Commissioners heard from 213 people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in private sessions, representing 3.1 per cent of all survivors. In brief, of the people who provided the relevant information:

- On average, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were aged 10.7 years when they were first sexually abused. The majority said they experienced non-penetrative contact sexual abuse (79.3 per cent). Most said they had experienced sexual abuse on multiple occasions (84.8 per cent), and two-thirds by a single person (66.7 per cent). Almost half (46.2 per cent) said they experienced penetrative abuse and almost one-quarter (24.5 per cent) described experiences consistent with having their privacy violated.
- Like other survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds commonly described experiencing emotional (82.3 per cent) and/or other physical abuse (56.6 per cent) before, during or after the sexual abuse. Almost one-fifth (17.7 per cent) witnessed the abuse of other children.

- Most commonly, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described being sexually abused by a person in a religious ministry (32.5 per cent) and/or a teacher (24.1 per cent). More than one-third (35.2 per cent) described sexual abuse that occurred in a school, and almost one-third (31.9 per cent) indicated they were abused in historical form of out-of-home care such as a children's home.
- The majority of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (60.1 per cent) said they were abused in an institution managed by a religious organisation. Among these survivors, most said they were abused in an institution managed by the Catholic Church (57.8 per cent) and almost one in five (18.8 per cent) said they were abused in a Jewish-managed institution.

## Circumstances at the time of abuse

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often described experiencing a sense of isolation as a child. Language barriers, cultural differences and discrimination often increased a family's dependence on religious communities, and some perpetrators exploited this dependence by acting in friendly ways and appearing to offer refuge from hostile social conditions.

Many survivors said that looking or sounding different to other children in the institution made them targets for bullying and victimisation – by other children, and sometimes by adults. Bullying and name-calling left them feeling as though their safety and wellbeing mattered less than that of other children. For some, social isolation acted as a barrier to disclosure: as children, many survivors felt they had no one to tell about the abuse.

## Experiences of disclosure

Like other survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who disclosed during childhood often told an adult in authority at the institution or their parents. They told us they were commonly disbelieved. Like other survivors, those who delayed disclosure said they did so due to shame and embarrassment and a fear of punishment or of not being believed. Some said they did not disclose because their parents held the institution and the perpetrator in high regard. They said their parents had risked a lot – sometimes their lives – to come to Australia and felt very connected and loyal to the religious or cultural institution that had offered them support during their early years in the country. Male survivors sometimes said they did not disclose due to strong expectations of men and masculinity that meant expressions of emotion were perceived as weakness.

## Wellbeing

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who had little contact with people outside of their community said they were deeply affected by the sexual abuse. Many felt that they lost their social and support networks after disclosing the abuse and found themselves questioning their faith and community. Like other survivors, some survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds had thoughts of or had attempted suicide. Many survivors cited support from partners and other family members as an important source of strength and resilience. Survivors who had lived in residential care as a child – and especially those who were child migrants – described adult lives that had been compromised by the poor standard of education they received. Accessing redress and financial compensation rarely improved survivors' wellbeing in the long term, with many describing the process as re-traumatising.

## Survivors with disability at the time of abuse

---

The Royal Commission's framework for defining disability was based on the understanding that physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are common aspects of human functioning. Impairments, health conditions or chronic illnesses can be considered a disability when environmental and personal factors hinder a person's full and effective participation in society.

Commissioners heard from 293 survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse, representing 4.3 per cent of all survivors. In brief, of the people who provided the relevant information:

- On average, survivors with disability were aged 10.9 years when they were first sexually abused. The majority said they were sexually abused on multiple occasions (86.1 per cent) by a single person (58.7 per cent) for a duration of one year or less (62.8 per cent).
- The majority of survivors with disability said they experienced non-penetrative contact sexual abuse (64.1 per cent) and/or sexual abuse with penetration (56.5 per cent). One in four (25.0 per cent) also said their privacy was violated. Often, survivors said they were sexually abused under the guise of carers conducting activities that were considered 'appropriate' for their role, such as assisting the victim with bathing and dressing.
- Like other survivors, most survivors with disability said they also experienced other abuse in the lead up to, during and/or after the child sexual abuse, such as emotional (79.7 per cent) and/or physical abuse (67.6 per cent) or witnessing the abuse of other children (20.3 per cent). Survivors often said they were humiliated and teased about their disability. Survivors with physical impairments described situations where adults in the institution had taken advantage of children's inability to remove themselves from uncomfortable or painful situations, such as by leaving them in urine-soaked beds at night as punishment.

- Survivors with disability were most commonly sexually abused by adults (74.5 per cent). Almost one in five (17.4 per cent) said they were abused by a person in religious ministry. A slightly smaller proportion (16.4 per cent) said they were abused by a residential care worker and 14.6 per cent said they were abused by a teacher. More than one in three survivors with disability (35.4 per cent) said they were abused by another child.
- More than one-third of survivors with disability (34.1 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused in an historical out-of-home care institution, such as an orphanage, children's home or disability-specific residential care facility. Close to one-third (32.4 per cent) said they were abused in a school and one in 10 (10.2 per cent) reported abuse in a hospital, doctor's surgery or rehabilitation facility.

## Circumstances at the time of abuse

Many survivors described a society where it was common and accepted for children with disability to be removed from their parents and placed in the care of an institution. They spoke of an era when 'people didn't have high expectations of people with disabilities' and where people with disability were 'out of sight and out of mind'.<sup>3</sup> Some survivors believed they were placed in institutions that did not meet their needs. This was especially common among survivors who were labelled as having 'behavioural issues' but placed in institutions for children with profound intellectual and physical disabilities.

Like other survivors, survivors with disability often described institutions as lacking procedures and codes of conduct that might have protected children from sexual abuse. They commonly said they were left alone in the company of sexually abusive adults and children with harmful sexual behaviours. Survivors who grew up in residential institutions often said that sexual and physical abuse was so widespread they thought it was a normal part of being a child in an institution.

Like other survivors, survivors with disability who grew up in residential institutions often said they had no or very little contact with their birth families during childhood. Survivors who lived with their families often said they lived in a supportive and loving environment. They often said they believed they became vulnerable to sexual abuse due to high levels of deference and trust towards people in authority in institutions, such as people in religious ministry and health professionals.

## Experiences of disclosure

Most often, we were told that survivors with disability made deliberate attempts to disclose the details of the sexual abuse – often to a parent. Survivors with communication and cognitive impairments were particularly reliant on supportive adults noticing changes in their behaviour after the abuse. Children without protective adults in their lives, including many who lived in residential care, said their attempts to disclose were disbelieved, ignored or punished. Survivors who disclosed to police were often left disappointed. Commissioners heard that police would not pursue criminal charges because the victim – who often had a communication or cognitive impairment – was not viewed as a ‘credible witness’. Survivors perceived that mainstream and disability-specific services were ill-equipped to deal effectively with disclosures of sexual abuse by people with disability.

## Wellbeing

Like other survivors, survivors with disability often told Commissioners they struggled to deal with feelings of anger, shame and low self-confidence following the sexual abuse. Others felt deep despair and hopelessness. Many had considered suicide and some had attempted suicide. Some survivors said they had difficulty forming friendships or described themselves as lonely. Many survivors said they experienced difficulties with education and employment at some point in their lives, which they believed was due to not receiving a quality education because the institution they attended wasn’t equipped to teach children with disability. Others said they experienced discrimination and prejudice in the workplace, and that this had affected their opportunity to participate as fully in work as they would have liked.

## Survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session

---

The Royal Commission’s inmate engagement strategy involved Royal Commission officers visiting correctional centres across Australia and working with staff and prisoner representatives. In total, Commissioners heard from 713 survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session, representing 10.4 per cent of all survivors. In brief, of the people who provided the relevant information:

- Most were male (91.0 per cent), consistent with the wider adult prison population in Australia.
- On average, survivors in prison were aged 11.3 years when they were first sexually abused in an institutional context, though many said they experienced physical and sexual abuse prior to this, often within the family. The majority were sexually abused on multiple occasions (86.7 per cent). Most said they were sexually abused by a single person (53.7 per cent), and almost three-quarters for a duration of one year or less (71.5 per cent).

- The majority of survivors in prison described non-penetrative contact sexual abuse (65.4 per cent) and/or sexual abuse with penetration (59.2 per cent). Almost one in four (24.0 per cent) said their privacy was violated, often by being watched while in the shower or being subjected to unnecessary strip searches in youth detention. Many also experienced other abuse alongside the sexual abuse, such as physical (72.3 per cent) and/or emotional abuse (72.1 per cent).
- More than one-quarter of survivors in prison (28.3 per cent) said they were sexually abused by custodial staff, including in youth detention settings, and one in five (19.3 per cent) said they were abused by a person in religious ministry. Similar proportions said they were abused by a residential care worker (14.7 per cent) or a foster carer (14.6 per cent).
- Half of the survivors in prison said they were abused in out-of-home care (50.5 per cent). Almost one-third of survivors in prison (32.7 per cent) said they were sexually abused in a youth detention facility, and 16.0 per cent said they were abused in a school.

## Circumstances at the time of abuse

The majority of survivors in prison described entrenched disadvantage when they were growing up. From a young age, they were often subjected to multiple types of sexual and other abuse. Some were abandoned at a young age and spent much of their childhood being passed from one extended family member to the next. As they grew older, they spent less time at home to avoid family dysfunction. They said they had to look after themselves, but often did not know how to do this in safe ways. Sometimes their involvement in petty crime or substance use brought them to the attention of police and welfare authorities. Some survivors saw links between their home environments and their vulnerability to child sexual abuse in institutional settings.

Survivors in prison commonly described a childhood moving frequently in and out of out-of-home care placements, sometimes experiencing homelessness, time in youth detention and then prison. Some experienced abuse and assault in all of these institutions. Some felt vulnerable to abuse in out-of-home care because the foster family knew they had been in multiple placements, and that they probably had no supportive parents or friends. Many described youth detention centres as violent places where physical abuse perpetrated by staff towards children was tolerated as a means of enforcing rules.



## Experiences of disclosure

Most survivors in prison waited until adulthood to disclose their experience of child sexual abuse. Almost one-third of survivors in prison (31.4 per cent) told their story for the first time to the Royal Commission. Most male survivors said their childhood circumstances had forced them to become independent and self-reliant from a young age, and that revealing child sexual abuse would have been seen as a weakness by their peers. In contrast, female survivors often said there was an understanding among women in prison that many had been sexually abused at some time in their lives, and that they were supported and encouraged by other prisoners to talk about the experience of child sexual abuse.

## Wellbeing

For many survivors, child sexual abuse in an institution was only one in a series of multiple childhood traumas. Most reported symptoms of mental illness, including self-harm, suicide attempts, addiction, sleeping problems, flashbacks and triggers. Many spoke about anger, and sometimes criminal offences that were related to violence. Most survivors said that they had been involved with the criminal justice system for some time, usually for crimes linked to substance use. Some said that after spending so much of their life in youth detention and prison they had become institutionalised and struggled to readjust to life outside prison after being released. Some survivors said they had found strength from accessing education, counselling and other therapeutic services in prison. Others said they felt that mental health services in prisons were focused on preventing suicide and managing medications rather than providing the kind of long-term care some survivors felt they needed to deal with the consequences of child sexual abuse and other trauma.

## Survivors' suggestions for change

---

Many survivors stressed that their key motivation for attending a private session was to tell Commissioners about their ideas for change.

Survivors suggested that child sexual abuse in institutions may be better prevented by improving community understanding of child sexual abuse, including the prevalence of abuse in institutions, and by countering misconceptions about perpetrators of child sexual abuse in institutions. They also said that abuse may be better prevented in institutions by improving supervision and monitoring of staff, especially when they were alone with children, and better background screening of adults wishing to work or volunteer with children. Some survivors acknowledged that people who were motivated to sexually abuse children would find their way around even the best-designed systems.

Other survivors suggested changes to institutional culture to enable more age-appropriate discussion of sex and sexuality with children. They believed that changing the norms for acceptable conduct between children may better prevent bullying, harassment and sexual abuse. Some said that prevention education for children to recognise the signs of sexual abuse and to know how to respond was important, especially for children with disability who often received no or very limited sex and sexuality education. Other survivors said institutional staff should also be trained in what constitutes child sexual abuse and how to better detect grooming behaviours.

Survivors suggested that responses to allegations of child sexual abuse could be improved by better communication between institutions and parents and carers, so parents and carers could better understand what the institutions were doing to respond to incidents and to prevent further sexual abuse from occurring. This was especially the case for survivors who had been sexually abused by another child.

Survivors who had disclosed in childhood often said they wanted the criminal justice system to be more 'child friendly'. This sentiment was echoed by parents and carers of survivors with disability, and especially those with communication and cognitive impairments. They felt that the system would be more accessible and supportive of people with disability if communication and cognitive impairments were better accommodated.

Survivors felt they could be better supported by greater access to specialised counselling services – immediately and in the years and decades following the abuse. Survivors in prison said they needed support in prison and after being released. Others discussed a need for appropriate redress, through a scheme that was efficient and straight forward. Many survivors said a memorial may help to acknowledge and remember the past, which was an important part of protecting children in the future.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

---

When the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was established in 2013 and the Terms of Reference laid out, the first priority was to hear from people affected by child sexual abuse in institutions. To facilitate this, the Royal Commission designed the mechanism we call private sessions. Between May 2013 and May 2017, 6,875 people voluntarily came forward and told their stories to one or more Commissioners during a private session.<sup>4</sup> The Royal Commission did not request or direct any individual to attend a private session. While each person's story was unique, common themes emerged. This volume describes these themes and presents what we have learned about child sexual abuse in institutions from the people who told their stories to Commissioners during a private session.

The four categories we adopted to describe the themes that emerged from survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse in institutions are:

- 1. Experiences of abuse**, which describes what survivors told us about the nature of the child sexual abuse, the institutions where the child sexual abuse occurred, characteristics of adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours, and how victims tried to protect themselves at the time of the abuse. Some survivors did not wish to describe the detail of the child sexual abuse they experienced. Others did. The nature of the child sexual abuse included penetrative sexual abuse, non-penetrative genital contact, violations of privacy, grooming, exposure to sexual acts and material and child sexual exploitation. Many survivors said they experienced psychological and/or physical abuse before, during and after the child sexual abuse. The vast majority of survivors told us they were sexually abused by a male perpetrator. While most survivors said they attempted to protect themselves from the sexual abuse in some way, they also said they felt powerless to stop it.
- 2. Circumstances at the time of abuse**, which describes what survivors told us about the social, cultural, institutional and family-related circumstances at the time of the child sexual abuse. Some suggested these circumstances may have made them more vulnerable to child sexual abuse. The majority of survivors said they were sexually abused in historical residential institutions (that is, those operating before 1990), such as children's homes and orphanages; or educational institutions, such as day and boarding schools. Most of these historical residential institutions were managed by religious organisations and most no longer exist.

3. **Experiences of disclosure**, which describes how survivors told others, including institutions, about the child sexual abuse, what helped and did not help them disclose the abuse and how various people and institutions responded to their disclosures. Most survivors said they took many years to formally disclose the details of the sexual abuse. They often felt ashamed and embarrassed by what had occurred or had no one to tell. Survivors' stories suggest disclosures were often ignored or dismissed. Most feared punishment, and many were punished, for disclosing.
4. **Wellbeing**, which describes what survivors told us about their wellbeing at different points in their lives, what has helped or not helped them manage the consequences of child sexual abuse, and their sources of strength and resilience. The vast majority of survivors said they had experienced mental health issues at some point during their lives, and a substantial number also indicated they had problems establishing and/or maintaining interpersonal relationships. Most believed being sexually abused as a child had affected their life outcomes. Survivors' wellbeing often fluctuated over time. Support from friends, family and counsellors helped many people. Some continue to experience loneliness and isolation.

These themes are discussed with reference to all survivors, as well as survivors belonging to one or more of the following diverse and vulnerable groups:

1. children and young people aged under 25 at the time of their private session
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors
3. survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
4. survivors with disability at the time of the abuse
5. survivors in prison at the time of their private session.

## 1.2 Terms of Reference

---

The Letters Patent establishing the Royal Commission required that it 'inquire into institutional responses to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and related matters' and set out the Terms of Reference of the inquiry.

In carrying out this task, we were directed to focus on systemic issues, informed by an understanding of individual cases. We were required to make findings and recommendations to better protect children against sexual abuse and alleviate the impact of abuse on children when it occurred.

This volume particularly addresses paragraph (e) of the Terms of Reference, which directed us to inquire into:

the experience of people directly or indirectly affected by child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts, and the provision of opportunities for them to share their experiences in appropriate ways while recognising that many of them will be severely traumatised or will have special support needs.

We were committed to sharing these experiences with the broader Australian community. We were in a privileged position and able to validate the experiences of those who told us their stories, in contrast to the dismissal, denial and lack of recognition many survivors told us they experienced during previous attempts at disclosure. While the experiences of survivors have much in common, each survivor had their own story to tell about their experience of child sexual abuse, the circumstances surrounding the abuse, their experience of disclosure and their experience of wellbeing in the immediate aftermath as well as the years and decades following the abuse.

### 1.3 Links with other volumes

---

This volume provides an analysis of survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse in institutions as told to Commissioners in private sessions. The volume draws only upon what survivors said during the private sessions. Over one in three survivors who attended a private session were adults who described sexual abuse in historical residential institutions, including Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and members of the Stolen Generations. Although the experiences of many of these survivors are included throughout this volume, the specific experiences of survivors of historical residential institutions are explored in detail in Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*. Volume 11 draws on survivors' written accounts, private sessions as well as research and findings from public hearings.

Over half of survivors in private sessions told Commissioners they were sexually abused in institutions managed by religious organisations. Although the experiences of many of these survivors are also included throughout this volume, the nature of these institutions and the specific experiences of survivors who described abuse in these institutions are examined in detail in Volume 16, *Religious institutions*.

Some of the themes in this volume are also covered in other volumes, drawing on sources including research, policy consultations and findings from public hearings, specifically:

- experiences of abuse (Volume 2, *Nature and cause*)
- impacts of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts (Volume 3, *Impacts*)
- experiences of disclosure (Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse*).

This volume examines survivors' experiences in all institutional contexts. Volumes 11 to 16 consider particular institutions in more detail, such as contemporary out-of-home care (Volume 12), schools (Volume 13), sport and recreation institutions (Volume 14) and religious institutions (Volume 16).

## 1.4 Limitations of our work

---

The themes described in this volume are confined to the experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions who participated in a private session. We do not know how well the experiences of these survivors reflect the experiences of survivors who did not attend a private session.

The themes described in this volume reflect what survivors told the Commissioners in private sessions. Every effort has been made to accurately and completely describe these themes.

The Royal Commission did not use a structured approach in its private sessions and Commissioners encouraged survivors to tell their stories in their own way. Some survivors described their experiences of child sexual abuse and its impacts on their lives in great detail during their private session. For a range of reasons, others provided limited or no detail. Some survivors found it easier to talk about some experiences than others. Some did not remember or were uncertain about some aspects of their experiences. Other survivors chose not to share because it brought back memories of painful experiences they preferred to forget. As a result, these themes are not drawn from a consistent and comprehensive set of information from every private session.

## 1.5 Key terms

---

The inappropriate use of words to describe child sexual abuse and the people who experience the abuse can have silencing, stigmatising and other harmful effects. Conversely, the appropriate use of words can empower and educate.

For these reasons, we have taken care with the words used in this report. Some key terms used in this volume are set out below. A complete glossary is contained in Volume 1, *Our inquiry*.

In this volume:

## Child sexual abuse

The term ‘child sexual abuse’ refers to any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. Sexually abusive behaviours can include the fondling of genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and exposing the child to or involving the child in pornography. It includes child grooming, which refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child to lower the child’s inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child.

## Victim and survivor

We use the terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ to describe someone who has been sexually abused as a child in an institutional context. We use the term ‘victim’ when referring to a person who has experienced child sexual abuse at the time the abuse occurred. We use the term ‘survivor’ when referring to a person who has experienced child sexual abuse after the abuse occurred, such as when they are sharing their story or accessing support. Where the context is unclear, we have used the term ‘victim’. We recognise that some people prefer ‘survivor’ because of the resilience and empowerment associated with the term.

We recognise that some people who have experienced abuse do not feel that they ‘survived’ the abuse, and that ‘victim’ is more appropriate. We also recognise that some people may have taken their lives as a consequence of the abuse they experienced. We acknowledge that ‘victim’ is more appropriate in these circumstances. We also recognise that some people do not identify with either of these terms.

When asked if she considers herself ‘a survivor’, one private session attendee, ‘Jody’, said she did not like the term.<sup>5</sup> Some of her siblings, who, like her, grew up in a mission, have since died and she rejects the suggestion that they were not ‘strong enough to survive’. Also, she added, ‘I don’t know if I survived’.<sup>6</sup>

‘Parents’ or ‘family and friends’ refers to those who told us during a private session about the sexual abuse of their child, sibling or loved one, including of any effects the abuse may have had on them.

## 1.6 Structure of this volume

---

**Chapter 2** describes the private sessions model, including how it was adapted to meet the needs of diverse and vulnerable groups. It also describes how information arising from private sessions was managed, and the number and location of private sessions during the term of the Royal Commission.

**Chapter 3** describes themes from private sessions, drawn from an analysis of the accounts of 6,875 survivors who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017. The analysis is structured around four categories:

1. the experience of the abuse, including demographic information about the victim at the time of the abuse, the type and duration of the abuse, perpetrator demographics and information about the institution where the abuse occurred
2. circumstances at the time of the abuse, such as the social and cultural context, institutional context and the victims' family circumstances
3. experiences of disclosure, noting that disclosure is not a one-off event
4. survivors' wellbeing immediately after and in the years and decades following the abuse.

**Chapters 4–8** profile the experiences of child sexual abuse from the perspective of survivors who belong to one or more of the following groups:

- children and young people under 25 at the time of their private session
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors
- survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- survivors with disability at the time of the abuse
- survivors in prison at the time of their private session.

**Chapter 9** presents a summary of the suggestions for change survivors made during private sessions. Particular reference is made to suggestions relating to the prevention of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, as well as suggestions for improving institutional responses and the support provided to survivors and their families following abuse.



## 2 The Royal Commission and private sessions

### 2.1 Overview

---

It was apparent to the Australian Government at the time the Royal Commission was established that many people (ultimately thousands) would want to tell us about their personal experiences of institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

When explaining the need for private sessions, the Attorney-General stated:

A traditional royal commission hearing setting will not generally serve as the best way to facilitate participation in the Royal Commission by those people affected by child sexual abuse.

For many, telling their story will be deeply personal and traumatic. While we cannot know at this time how many people will wish to participate, sadly we know that this crime has affected many in our community.

In order to carry out its inquiry, the private session mechanism will give the Royal Commission greater flexibility to directly hear from a potentially large number of people. Participants will not need to tell their accounts on oath or affirmation. These private sessions will not be open to the public and participation will be voluntary.<sup>7</sup>

*The Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) was amended specifically to allow the Royal Commission to hear from survivors in private sessions. The Act provides that a private session is not a hearing of the Royal Commission.<sup>8</sup> Nor is a person who appears at a private session a witness before the Royal Commission or considered to be giving evidence.<sup>9</sup>

The Act is not prescriptive regarding the conduct of private sessions. This allowed the Royal Commission to be flexible in catering for the different needs of those wishing to attend a private session.

Private sessions were the primary way for the Commissioners to listen to survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. They enabled survivors and others affected by child sexual abuse to speak confidentially to a Commissioner or Commissioners in a private and supportive environment. The majority of those who attended were survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions. We also heard from family members, friends and whistleblowers who were affected by the child sexual abuse of others.

Many survivors told us how important it was to them to tell their story to a Commissioner who in their eyes, represented the 'highest authority in the land'. They felt that the Australian Government and the people of Australia were finally taking them seriously and that what they had to say about their experiences of child sexual abuse was valued – that it mattered and they mattered.

For some survivors, telling their story to a Commissioner in a private session was the first time they had disclosed their experience of child sexual abuse. For others, it was the first time in their life they felt they had been heard. Many survivors told us that their private session was a powerful healing experience.<sup>10</sup> ‘Marlene’ disclosed to a psychiatrist after 50 years and had recently raised it with her two sons, before attending her private session.

I never told a soul. I grew up with such dominating fear and I couldn’t understand why. If it wasn’t for the Royal Commission we’d all go to our graves with those horrors in our memory and nobody knowing about them. I think it’s a miracle really, I don’t know what other word to use. All these people that have these memories are getting set free.<sup>11</sup>

The Royal Commission understood that survivors may find it traumatic to share their experiences of child sexual abuse during a private session. We established an in-house counselling team to support survivors before, during and after their private session. In addition, the Australian Government funded independent counselling and support services during the term of the Royal Commission. Survivors could be referred to these services at any time. Survivors could also receive information and advice from knowmore, a free and independent national legal service for survivors who came to the Royal Commission.<sup>12</sup> Copies of the knowmore brochures given to survivors are at Appendices A and B.

Listening to firsthand accounts of survivors’ experiences informed our understanding of the nature and scale of child sexual abuse in institutions, the circumstances in which the abuse occurred and the devastating impacts sexual abuse often had on the lives of those affected.

## 2.2 The private sessions model

---

The private sessions model was carefully designed using trauma-informed principles. We wanted to do everything we could to be sensitive to the diverse, far-reaching and ongoing impacts of childhood trauma on survivors. We endeavoured to engage survivors in ways that affirmed their experiences and responses. We aimed to minimise interactions and processes that could increase their trauma. We tried to be highly responsive, respectful and transparent. We hoped survivors felt safe and trusted the Royal Commission and its processes.

The private sessions model was designed to be flexible and responsive to the diversity of survivors’ needs and capacities. In general, private sessions followed the model described in this section. In some circumstances, the model was adapted more substantially to ensure all people were afforded equal opportunity to share their story of child sexual abuse. Examples of these more substantial adaptations are provided in Section 2.3, ‘Adapting private sessions’.

### 2.2.1 Initiating and preparing for a private session

Most people made initial contact with the Royal Commission by telephone, email or letter. In most cases those making contact were survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions. Some family members, friends and whistleblowers also made contact.<sup>13</sup> Trained staff collected information by telephone about the person, their situation and their experiences. Survivors, their family members and whistleblowers with experiences or information within our Terms of Reference were offered a private session. They could also submit their account in a written format.

We aimed to provide a private session to people as soon as possible after they made contact with the Royal Commission. Due to the high demand, many people waited for more than a year to attend a private session. We regretted this lengthy wait and did our best to reassure survivors that they had not been forgotten by keeping in contact during their waiting period. Our attempts to achieve this included:

- sending people a letter about a month after they registered with the Royal Commission to attend a private session. The letter confirmed their registration and explained the length of the waiting period. The letter also provided information about who to contact during the waiting period if they had any questions, wanted to talk to a counsellor or needed assistance from other support services. An example is provided at Appendix C.
- making contact by telephone about halfway through the waiting period, in most cases. This call provided updated information on the waiting time and the services survivors could access for support. It was also an opportunity to confirm contact details.
- making contact by telephone about three weeks before the private session. The purpose of this call was to determine the suitability of the proposed date, time and venue for the session. Royal Commission staff also asked whether the person had any travel, communication and/or support needs we needed to cater for and arrange in advance.
- sending a letter confirming the date, time and venue of the private session. The letter provided information on transport and parking options, and where relevant, taxi vouchers, flight and/or accommodation booking details. An example is provided at Appendix D.

Survivors were encouraged to prepare for their private session. We provided them with a booklet so they knew what to expect. A copy of the booklet, *Sharing your story: A guide to your private session*, is provided at Appendix E.

In addition, survivors were given a guide to help them plan how they would tell Commissioners about their experiences within the time available. A copy of the guide, *Practice Guideline 3: Guide questions for providing a statement or information to the Royal Commission*, is provided at Appendix F. This information, together with a short video, was also available on the Royal Commission website.

On occasion, the Royal Commission brought forward the date of a private session. This occurred when a person had significant health issues, was terminally ill and wanted to speak to a Commissioner before they died, or was about to relocate overseas.

In the weeks before the private session, the Royal Commission prepared by:

- booking an appropriate venue, and ensuring that all equipment (for example, audio recording devices) was delivered and tested
- making travel arrangements for everyone who would be attending the session
- making practical arrangements to help survivors at their session (for example, making access arrangements for support dogs)
- collating information provided to the Royal Commission before the private session, so the Commissioner or Commissioners attending were familiar with the person's situation, experiences and anything relevant to the institutions involved.

### 2.2.2 Conducting private sessions

Private sessions were held in each capital city and in a number of regional locations to minimise travel times for survivors attending from regional and remote areas. The venues in each location were selected to maximise survivors' privacy and comfort.

Private sessions generally went for one hour and were conducted by one or two Commissioners, assisted by a Royal Commission officer. Survivors could bring support people of their choice. Only people authorised by a Commissioner could be present at each private session.<sup>14</sup> An example of the form a presiding Commissioner would sign authorising the presence of each person at a private session is at Appendix G.

Survivors were offered support from counsellors before, during and after their private session, in an attempt to limit the potential distress caused by sharing past traumatic experiences. Staff at the Royal Commission understood the time, effort and courage it took for survivors to come forward and participate in private sessions. Every effort was made to meet their needs and make them feel as safe and comfortable as possible. In some cases, this was as simple as accommodating a survivor's request to speak to a particular Commissioner, or to not have people of a particular gender present during their private session. If survivors could not attend in person, Commissioners could hear from them by telephone.

The content and direction of each private session was led by survivors and by what they wanted to discuss. It was up to each survivor to choose how and to what extent they detailed their experience of child sexual abuse. They were provided with opportunities to share their experiences, including the impact of the abuse and trauma. Some survivors chose to provide a lot of detail and others very little.

Rather than focusing only on the survivor's experience of child sexual abuse and trauma, conversation often led to reflections on elements of hope, humour, resistance and resilience. Reflecting on sources of strength and support helped to reduce the risk of re-traumatisation from taking part in the private session, which is possible when a person tells a story about a past traumatic experience. Many survivors offered suggestions for better protecting children in the future. They often said this was their primary reason for coming forward and participating in a private session.

If survivors presented information that related (or may have related) to a contravention (or evidence of a contravention) of an Australian law, the Royal Commission referred the information to police and other law enforcement bodies for investigation.<sup>15</sup> As of 31 July 2017, we had made 2252 referrals to police, and police had laid charges in a number of cases.

### 2.2.3 After a private session

At the immediate conclusion of the private session, survivors were offered the opportunity to talk to a Royal Commission counsellor. Within a week, the same counsellor telephoned them.<sup>16</sup> The survivor could talk about how they were feeling after their session and discuss any concerns they may have had. Referrals to local services for ongoing support were provided where appropriate.

The Royal Commission took steps to support survivors as they returned to their daily lives. When appropriate, survivors were provided with reimbursements for travel expenses they had incurred to attend their private session. All survivors were provided with a personal thank you card signed by the Chair of the Royal Commission and the presiding Commissioner. They also received a booklet describing what they could expect in the weeks and months following a private session. The booklet described the feelings survivors commonly experienced after attending a private session and suggested strategies for managing feelings of anger or depression. It also described how the Royal Commission used survivors' personal information, including how it was de-identified. The booklet informed survivors they would be contacted by a Royal Commission counsellor within a few weeks and provided contact details for crisis and additional support. A copy of the booklet, *After sharing your story*, is provided at Appendix H.

Survivors were invited to contribute to a book, *Message to Australia*. This book contains short descriptions of survivors' experiences and recommendations for making the future safer for all children. The *Message to Australia* book will be housed at the National Library of Australia, where it will be available to the public and preserved for future generations.

## 2.3 Adapting private sessions

---

In some circumstances, the private sessions model required substantial adaptation. To provide the safest and most appropriate environment for people to come forward and tell their stories, the Royal Commission took guidance from survivors, support groups, advocates and community organisations. Royal Commission staff contacted survivors on several occasions in the lead-up to their private session to identify their needs and make the necessary arrangements to ensure they would be accommodated. Commissioners adapted to survivors' needs on the day of the private session.

### 2.3.1 Telephone sessions

Private sessions were also conducted by telephone, including when:

- a survivor could not travel to a venue for a face-to-face session for health or practical reasons, or if they found it too confronting to attend in person
- a survivor's ability to travel changed at the last moment and conducting the private session by telephone was preferable to rescheduling
- a survivor wanted to share their story and was located outside of Australia.

Survivors who shared their story by telephone were encouraged to have a support person with them during their private session. Like survivors who attended in person, they were offered the opportunity to speak with a Royal Commission counsellor after the session.

### 2.3.2 Group sessions

Some survivors felt that they could better share their story in a group setting. Group sessions were held with family groups, and with members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. One example of this was the group session with 'Tammy' and her siblings (see group private session with 'Tammy', 'Tony', 'Terry' and 'Harvey' that follows).<sup>17</sup>

### **Group private session with ‘Tammy’, ‘Tony’, ‘Terry’ and ‘Harvey’**

‘Tammy’ contacted the Royal Commission to request a private session, and asked that she attend with her three brothers, ‘Tony’, ‘Terry’ and ‘Harvey’. The four siblings are Aboriginal and had been removed from their parents when they were all under the age of five. They were placed in a Presbyterian home, and later separated and sent to different foster or residential homes across the state.

The siblings knew of each other’s abuse but had never openly discussed their time spent in care or the sexual abuse they experienced until they attended the private session. ‘Tammy’ told the Commissioner that because they had been separated, she found it difficult to communicate with her brothers. The siblings were united in ‘Harvey’s’ view that ‘family was everything. You don’t lie to your family. You tell the family the truth ... You respect each other’.

The private session was conducted over several hours. The survivors described their experiences and provided recommendations for how Aboriginal children might be better protected from sexual abuse in the future. After the private session, the survivors had a group debrief with a counsellor.

‘Tony’ told the Commissioner that the process of describing their experiences as a group ‘puts us on the one page and it all adds up’. ‘Tammy’ said that attending as a group had united them as a family.<sup>18</sup>

### **2.3.3 Private sessions with diverse and vulnerable groups**

We heard from a wide range of people over the course of this inquiry. The survivors who came forward were from many different backgrounds and had diverse experiences and needs that had evolved across their lifetimes. Factors such as age, geographical location, gender, faith, culture, disability and sexuality all influenced the way survivors understood and dealt with child sexual abuse. These factors also affected how institutions, families and communities responded to the abuse.

Within the widely diverse experiences of this group, some children faced heightened risks. We heard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds commonly experienced additional challenges that increased their vulnerability to sexual abuse. These children were not inevitably more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Rather, they commonly encountered circumstances that either put them at greater risk of sexual abuse in institutions, made it less likely they would be able to disclose or report the child sexual abuse, or were more likely to receive an inadequate response if disclosing the child sexual abuse. While all children are vulnerable to sexual abuse, there are specific extra dimensions of risk and vulnerability for these populations.

Private sessions were adapted to enable survivors from more vulnerable groups to attend. The extent of the adaptation depended on the needs of the survivors and was customised in consultation with them. Some survivors felt no adaptation was required, and in these cases, the private session model described in Section 2.2, 'The private sessions model', was used.

Adapting the private sessions model where necessary to accommodate survivors' different support needs enabled Commissioners to better understand the experience of child sexual abuse for people with particular vulnerabilities.

The following sub-sections detail how private sessions were adapted for survivors in the following five groups: children; people with disability; people from a culturally or linguistically diverse background; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and adults in prison.

## Children

The Royal Commission provided an opportunity for children under the age of 18 to tell their story in a private session. One of the Royal Commission's primary concerns for these sessions was to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child. The decision about whether a child would take part in a session rested on whether it would be in the child's best interests. Where it was proposed a child might attend a private session, their cognitive, linguistic and emotional capacities for engaging in a private session were assessed by a qualified Royal Commission counsellor to ensure their wellbeing would not be adversely affected. A copy of the Royal Commission's *Procedures for engagement and support of children and young people in private sessions* is at Appendix I.

The Royal Commission did not set a minimum age limit for children attending private sessions. In most cases, children aged 10 or younger did not attend and Commissioners were told of their experiences by their parents or another adult. Where it was deemed inappropriate for a child to attend a session, they were invited to contribute in other ways, such as by drawing or writing to the Royal Commission.

Before proceeding, Commissioners talked with the child or young person to make sure they understood the purpose of the session and what taking part would mean for them. If a child required additional support, adaptations were made to the session wherever possible. This included using communication equipment and interpreters, linking with culturally appropriate staff and support services, or using culturally appropriate resources. A copy of the checklist used by Commissioners and Royal Commission officers when conducting a private session with children is at Appendix J.

'Imogen', 'Kylie' and 'Michael's' account of 'Imogen's' experience of abuse, which follows, is one example of how private sessions have been conducted with children and young people.<sup>19</sup>



### **Private session with ‘Imogen’ and her parents**

‘Kylie’ and ‘Michael’ had one child, ‘Imogen’. ‘Imogen’ was 10 years old when she was sexually abused by her school principal, ‘Edward Forsyth’. ‘Imogen’ participated as a witness in ‘Forsyth’s’ criminal trial and found the experience deeply traumatic.

‘Imogen’s’ parents were concerned that the private session might be like the cross-examination she had experienced during the trial. A Royal Commission counsellor who specialised in working with children and young people met with ‘Imogen’ several weeks before the private session to determine whether attending was in her best interest. The counsellor also spoke with ‘Imogen’ to determine how the private session could be adapted to best suit her needs.

‘Imogen’ did not want to speak about her experience of abuse or hear the perpetrator’s name. Instead, she provided the Royal Commission with a written document and pictures. The narrative and pictures were detailed and graphic, and gave Commissioners insight into the impact of the abuse for ‘Imogen’ and her family. ‘Imogen’s’ parents, ‘Kylie’ and ‘Michael’, also participated in their own private session with a Commissioner.<sup>20</sup>

## **People with disability**

The Royal Commission worked with people with disability and their advocates to provide tailored assistance to those who wished to come forward to tell their story. Our engagement strategy included:

- training our staff in inclusive practice and disability awareness
- developing a range of materials to address different cognitive and communication needs including Plain English pictorial and video resources, resources in Auslan and resources with captions
- working closely with peak disability, representative and advocacy organisations across Australia and supporting their awareness of our work and processes, including through disability forums in every capital city, and by holding a roundtable and public hearing specific to disability issues.

To assist people with disability to attend private sessions, the Royal Commission provided communication support workers and interpreters and went to people’s homes in instances where physical conditions prevented them from travelling to us.

Some people with disability required a private session that extended over more than one day. One example of this is the private session with ‘Mitchell’ and ‘Kathryn’, in the narrative that follows.<sup>21</sup>

### Private session with ‘Mitchell’ and his mother

‘Mitchell’ attended a private session with his mother ‘Kathryn’. ‘Mitchell’ had been sexually abused as a child by a disability support service worker and by two ministers at the family’s local church.

‘Mitchell’ has autism, and together with ongoing trauma from the sexual abuse he had experienced, he needed time to build trust and rapport with people to tell his story.

‘Mitchell’ was non-verbal but communicated clearly through typing.

‘Mitchell’ and ‘Kathryn’ attended their private session over two separate days and ‘Mitchell’ communicated with the Commissioner with the assistance of an iPad.<sup>22</sup>

## People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

The Royal Commission was aware that for many communities, specific dimensions such as ethnicity, culture and language could present barriers to participating in private sessions. Community consultation conducted by the Royal Commission suggested people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were under-represented in private sessions. This consultation involved meetings with community leaders and advocates across Australia to seek their advice about the most effective ways to increase the participation of people from particular cultural, religious and ethnic groups in private sessions. Commissioners also led public multicultural forums in each state and territory.

Our broader program of engagement with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds included translating fact sheets into more than 10 languages and making them available on our website. Private sessions were adapted to enable interpreters and advocates to attend to support survivors and help them feel more comfortable telling their stories.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Royal Commission conducted an extensive program of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure those who wanted to share their story in a private session felt culturally safe and supported to do so. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from the Royal Commission and Commissioners travelled extensively to various cities and regional areas across Australia to build relationships with communities.<sup>23</sup> They met with community stakeholders – including elders, community members, local councils and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and legal services – to obtain permission and build support for our work. We also worked with survivor groups from particular historical institutions, such as the Cherbourg Mission, Retta Dixon Home and Kinchela Boys Home. A copy of the pamphlet, *Share your story: Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, is provided at Appendix K.

In most cases, private sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were conducted in the same flexible, adaptable way as for non-Indigenous survivors. In some cases, private sessions were adapted in more substantial ways. One example of this was the Kinchela Boys Home Gathering, which follows.

### **Kinchela Boys Home Gathering**

In October 2016, the Royal Commission was invited to take part in a weekend gathering of 11 former residents of Kinchela Training Home for Aboriginal Boys (Kinchela Boys Home). Support people including family members of some survivors and staff from Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation also attended the Gathering.

The Find and Connect web resource records that the Kinchela Boys Home was established in 1923 near Kempsey, New South Wales.<sup>24</sup> The home was intended to offer training in farm labouring to Aboriginal boys who had been removed from their families. *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (Bringing them home)* refers to extreme maltreatment, including sexual abuse of children at the home, over many decades until its closure in 1970.<sup>25</sup> Survivors from Kinchela Boys Home identify as members of the Stolen Generations.

At our Kinchela Boys Home Gathering, the majority of survivors participated in a private session. They also attended group forums and yarning circles, where they could discuss broader recollections of life at the home in a culturally safe environment. The Gathering made it possible for them to meet as a group with Commissioners to let us know about the strengths of their own culturally appropriate, peer-based approach to healing.

Kinchela survivors described the 'brotherhood' they had established through coming together over the past few years to share experiences and help each other with the impacts of the abuse. They had created a safe connection where they felt understood and accepted by others who had been through the same experience. The importance of this peer support was stressed to us, as we heard it provided a place of belonging where healing could begin. They asked for this model of healing to be supported, as part of an ongoing response to survivors.

## People in prison

The Royal Commission understood that many people who were serving time in an adult correctional centre may have experienced child sexual abuse in an institution. We established a national program to ensure these survivors had access to private sessions.

The private sessions model for prisoners was underpinned by agreements between the Royal Commission and the Commissioner or equivalent with responsibility for corrective services in each state and territory. The agreements allowed us to engage confidentially with prisoners in each jurisdiction. Each Commissioner for Corrective Services issued instructions to staff in their jurisdiction to abide by these agreements. Prison staff did not monitor phone calls or letters in relation to our work.

Royal Commission staff engaged with prisoner representative committees to provide information on our work so that prisoners were well informed about the scope of our inquiry and how they could tell us their stories. Royal Commission staff engaged directly with prisoners, often visiting people in cells, prison yards or education areas to speak with them directly.

The Royal Commission also developed specific communication materials, including materials for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability and people with low literacy. Some materials were translated into community languages and included infographic posters. A short film was shown in some correctional centres.

This work enabled Commissioners to hold face-to-face private sessions in over 60 prisons. People in prisons not visited by Commissioners could provide written accounts or provide their story by audio recording. Commissioners also conducted some private sessions with prisoners by telephone.

The Royal Commission established processes to ensure, where appropriate, referrals were made to psychological support services within prisons as well as external counselling and legal support services. Uniformed and non-uniformed prison staff were made aware of trauma-informed practice to assist them in managing and responding to prisoners who had experienced child sexual abuse. Procedures were also developed to ensure the safety of all participants before, during and after the private session.

## Survivor accounts: ‘Gerry Ann’s’ journey to the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission listened to thousands of individual stories of institutional child sexual abuse from adults, children and young people across Australia over its five-year duration. A recurring theme was the struggle of victims and survivors to come forward and talk about deeply disturbing memories of child sexual abuse. Coming to the Royal Commission to tell their story was not simply a matter of showing up. For many survivors, committing to a private session took enormous courage and emotional strength. It also carried the risk of re-traumatisation. Some had not been able to talk about their experience with anyone. Others had tried to disclose at the time of the abuse and had been disbelieved or dismissed. Many told Commissioners they had been punished following disclosure. ‘Gerry Ann’s’ journey to the Royal Commission highlights some common experiences described by survivors.<sup>26</sup> These include:

- the ongoing trauma from childhood experiences of child sexual abuse
- the continuing effect of memories decades after the child sexual abuse
- the ongoing impacts of child sexual abuse, including on relationships, mental and physical health, and the ability to trust others
- that disclosing child sexual abuse at any time is not a one-off event and is often re-traumatising
- the feeling that the Royal Commission was the first time someone in authority had listened to their story.

### **‘Gerry Ann’s’ journey to the Royal Commission**

One private session attendee, ‘Gerry Ann’, emailed the federal government within days of then Prime Minister Julia Gillard first announcing the creation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. She registered for a private session in October 2013, after which followed a pattern of withdrawal and re-engagement with the Commission over a period of three years.

‘Gerry Ann’s’ life was devastated by the sexual abuse she suffered as a small child growing up in an orphanage. ‘I lived in a climate of fear’, she said.

My time at [the orphanage] robbed me of my innocence, and set the benchmark of who I would become: frightened, petrified, scared, fearful, not worthy, introverted, isolated, segregated, sad and constantly suicidal. I should have been allowed to be a child, one who was happy and content, not looking over my shoulder to see where the next beating was coming from ... I was like a trained animal, knowing when to eat, sit, stand or pray. My personality was destroyed by the very people that were supposed to protect me.

‘Gerry Ann’ told no one about the physical and sexual abuse she endured. ‘I was scared of the governments ‘cause they let me down, I was scared of police because it was a police car that took me away.’ After giving birth in her late teens, and overcoming the feeling that she was ‘not good enough’, ‘Gerry Ann’ managed to raise her daughter ‘Rachel’ who has stood beside her on the ‘battlefield’ of her life.

Throughout the difficult times she experienced, ‘Gerry Ann’ remained committed to having a private session. However, despite her determination, she was not always ‘psychologically ready’ to tell her story. ‘I was going to talk to youse two years ago’, she told the Commissioner, ‘but because of the fragile state I was in, I still wasn’t strong enough’. While waiting in ‘no man’s land’ for the date of her private session, she became anxious and disengaged. After listening to evidence given by a Catholic priest during a Royal Commission public hearing, she attempted to take her own life and ended up in intensive care.

This was a turning point. ‘Rachel’ told us:

This was the first time I actually didn’t have to make the excuses. All I had to say was that she was an orphan, she’s re-traumatised ... and it was, ‘Say no more, we understand’. It’s because it’s out there in the public arena.

In 2016, Royal Commission counsellors supported ‘Gerry Ann’ in the scheduling process for a private session as a matter of priority. Within weeks, supported by ‘Rachel’ and caseworkers, ‘Gerry Ann’ attended her private session. During the session she told the Commissioner:

I’m shutting Pandora’s box this year ... I’ve handed it to you now. It’s not my problem anymore ... I’m not carrying this anymore. This isn’t my problem. Here you go, you deal with it. It’s not my guilt, my shame.

‘Gerry Ann’ finally received a thorough mental health assessment, and now has a ‘wonderful team’ providing her with holistic care.

‘Gerry Ann’ commented that if not for the Royal Commission she would never have had the opportunity to talk about what happened to her and may have remained tormented by the abusers for the rest of her life. The private sessions process helped her to feel vindicated and to realise that she was not crazy or to blame for what happened to her as a child. ‘Gerry Ann’ said that at the centre of her journey with the Royal Commission lay the importance of being believed for the first time, and of having someone in authority listen to her story.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.4 Managing private sessions information

---

Survivors provided information to the Royal Commission during private sessions on the understanding that their identity would be kept confidential.<sup>28</sup> The information gathered by the Royal Commission during private sessions is one of the richest and most extensive sources of information about child sexual abuse in institutional contexts that exists today. It has been used to inform all aspects of the Royal Commission's work.

Information provided to the Royal Commission as part of private sessions was confidential. In accordance with the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth), access to this information is generally prohibited unless consent of the survivor is obtained.<sup>29</sup> At the completion of the Royal Commission, private sessions information will be secured by the National Archives of Australia.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.4.1 Information sources

The Royal Commission developed a number of ways to collect, securely manage and analyse private sessions information. The following information was generated from each private session:

- an audio recording
- a summary written by the attending Royal Commission officer, which included an outline of the key themes the survivor discussed during their session, and listed any recommendations and suggestions for change they may have made
- a form which captured aspects of the survivor's story in quantitative format, such as demographic information about the survivor, the nature and types of abuse they experienced, the institution(s) and institution type where the abuse occurred, demographic information about the person who sexually abused them, their experiences of disclosure and the impacts of the abuse and trauma on their life. This information was entered into a database for analysis by Royal Commission researchers
- a file containing any additional information, such as documents and drawings a survivor may have provided to the Royal Commission before or during their private session.

Consistent with our commitment to provide a 'safe place to report', information provided during some private sessions was also referred to police.

## Narratives

Each survivor's private session was considered for inclusion in the Royal Commission's narrative collection. Narratives were intended to tell the story of an individual survivor in a way that would help people to understand their experience. To achieve this, narrative writers took the information survivors shared with Commissioners in their private sessions and condensed it into a brief de-identified narrative format that could be read by others. A copy of the guidelines provided to narrative writers is at Appendix L.

In most cases, a private session was deemed suitable for conversion into narrative format if the survivor had been asked and did not object to the de-identified use of their story. In a few cases, a private session was not converted to narrative format if it could not be appropriately de-identified or if there were outstanding legal issues.

Professional writers listened to the audio recording of each private session deemed suitable for conversion into narrative format. The writers also reviewed the survivor's file and any supporting documentation they may have provided. Each narrative was de-identified to protect the survivor's identity and ensure the information they had given us remained confidential. The de-identification process included attributing pseudonyms to people mentioned in the narrative, including the survivor and alleged adult perpetrator or child with harmful sexual behaviours, and removing institution names and locations that could identify the people in the narrative. Details of the person's story were not changed, though in some instances details were removed if they could identify the survivor, alleged adult perpetrator or child with harmful sexual behaviours, or the institution. The narrative collection can be found on the Royal Commission's website.



## Transcripts

Written transcripts were created following some private sessions at the request of Commissioners, policy officers and researchers. A professional transcription service provider was engaged to transcribe the audio recordings from the relevant private sessions. Written transcripts were used extensively for a range of purposes, including identifying research priorities, identifying key themes, providing background and supporting material for hearings, and conducting research.

## 2.5 Written accounts

---

Some people chose to tell their story of child sexual abuse in an institution in written format, rather than by attending a private session. The Royal Commission received 992 written accounts between May 2013 and May 2017. One or more Commissioners read each account.

There was no set format for written accounts and people chose a range of approaches to communicate their stories. Many accounts were prepared specifically for the Royal Commission. Others had been prepared for different purposes, such as statements for court proceedings, redress schemes or other inquiries. Written accounts usually contained similar information to that shared with Commissioners during private sessions.

The Royal Commission produced guidelines to assist people to prepare written accounts. A copy of the guide, *Sharing your story: A guide to your written account*, is provided at Appendix M.

The written accounts were confidential. However, under certain circumstances, the Royal Commission could provide some information contained in the written accounts to police.<sup>31</sup>

As with private sessions, written accounts informed our understanding of responses to child sexual abuse in institutions, but they have not been included in the analysis for this volume.

## 2.6 Number and location of private sessions

---

The Royal Commission held 6,961 private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017 – an average of 33 every week. Private sessions were held in 96 different locations across Australia. The Commissioners held private sessions in every capital city, in more than 25 regional locations and with prisoners from more than 60 correctional centres. A total of 358 private sessions were conducted via telephone, including 37 with people located in 13 countries outside of Australia.

The Royal Commission closed registrations for private sessions on 30 September 2016. This was a necessary step due to the high demand to attend them, the already long waiting list (containing over 1,500 registrations) and the fact that all aspects of the Royal Commission's work, including the tabling of the Final Report, needed to be completed by 15 December 2017. A comprehensive media campaign was conducted throughout Australia in the lead up to the closing date to encourage people to come forward and register for a private session by 30 September 2016. People who missed out, but still wanted to share their story with the Royal Commission, could do so by providing a written account. Everyone who shared their story in a private session or written account was also invited to add their own message in *Message to Australia*, as outlined in Section 2.2.3, 'After a private session'.

<b>Private sessions conducted</b>	6,961
<b>Institutions identified</b>	3,100
<b>Locations</b>	96

Note: The number of private sessions conducted exceeds the number of victims and survivors who attended private sessions. Several survivors attended two private sessions and some parents attended two private sessions – one with and one without their child. The number of private sessions includes private sessions conducted with whistleblowers. Whistleblowers are only included in the count of victims and survivors if the whistleblower identified a specific victim.

## 3 Themes from private sessions

### 3.1 Overview

---

Of the 6,875 people who came forward between May 2013 and May 2017 and voluntarily told their stories of child sexual abuse to one or more Commissioners during a private session, most (92.1 per cent) were survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions. We also heard from parents (5.0 per cent), other family members and friends (1.5 per cent) and whistleblowers (0.3 per cent) who were affected by the child sexual abuse of their loved ones or a child they knew.

As outlined in Chapter 1, throughout this volume the term ‘survivors’ is used to refer both to the survivors of child sexual abuse who participated in private sessions, and to the family members, carers and friends of survivors or deceased victims who attended a private session.

While each person’s story was unique, common themes emerged. Survivors shared their observations about the nature and contexts of the child sexual abuse and their experiences of disclosure. They also reflected on the ongoing effects child sexual abuse has had on them and those close to them, including on their health and wellbeing and their capacity to manage life’s challenges.

The purpose of this chapter is to document the common themes that emerged as survivors shared their experiences of child sexual abuse with Commissioners. The four categories we adopted to describe these themes are:

1. experiences of abuse
2. circumstances at the time of abuse
3. experiences of disclosure
4. wellbeing.

The thematic analysis was based on examination of:

- qualitative information from 61 de-identified transcripts
- quantitative information derived from the accounts of 6,875 survivors who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017.

The four categories adopted to describe these themes were first identified by a group of researchers contracted by the Royal Commission to undertake this work. The researchers reported their findings in *Life journeys of victim/survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions: An analysis of Royal Commission private sessions (Life journeys)*.

### 3.1.1 *Life Journeys* report

In early 2015, the Royal Commission contracted a group of researchers to conduct a ‘mixed method’ analysis of private sessions information, comprising:

- qualitative information from 61 de-identified transcripts
- quantitative information derived from the accounts of 2,794 survivors who attended private sessions between May 2013 and February 2015.

Royal Commission researchers conducted the quantitative analysis and provided the contracted researchers with summary information for use in their research. The research results were published in the *Life Journeys* report.<sup>32</sup>

This chapter provides an updated analysis of survivors’ experiences of child sexual abuse in institutions by drawing on the more extensive quantitative information provided by 6,875 survivors between May 2013 and May 2017.

### 3.1.2 Additional analyses

Chapters 4 to 8 build on the themes described in the *Life Journeys* report and apply them to survivors belonging to one or more diverse and/or potentially vulnerable groups. The themes for survivors in these groups were analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods involved analysis of narratives and summaries from private sessions. Some survivors also provided other qualitative information, such as drawings, pictures and written documents. These were considered where relevant and available. Researchers with expertise in qualitative research analysed these information sources using a technique common in social sciences research, called ‘thematic analysis’. This technique involves categorising qualitative information in different ways to identify meaningful patterns.

The quantitative methods involved statistical analysis of the forms that captured aspects of the survivor’s story in quantitative format. Analysis was restricted to descriptive statistics (for example, calculations of averages and proportions). Tests of statistical significance – which can be used to determine the probability or likelihood that the observed difference between two test groups in a research study will also occur in the wider population – were not performed due to the nature of the data gathered and the purpose of this volume.<sup>33</sup>

## 3.2 Profile of survivors who attended private sessions

As Table 5.1 shows, the majority of survivors who attended private sessions were male. A substantial minority (14.3 per cent) were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors.

**Table 5.1 – Gender, of all survivors, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

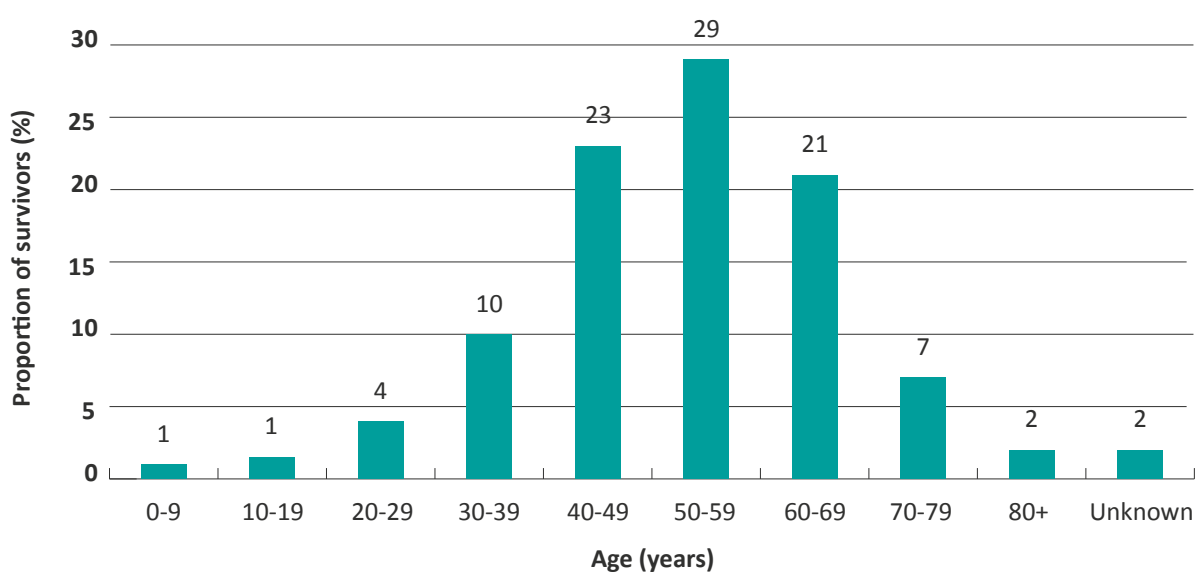
Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	4,422	64.3
Female	2,437	35.4
Other <sup>a</sup>	5	0.1
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	11	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

The majority of survivors were aged over 50 when they attended a private session. On average, males were slightly older (52.8 years) than females (50.9 years). Figure 5.1 shows survivors' age at the time of their private session according to 10 year age groupings. Almost one-third of survivors (29.3 per cent) were aged between 50 and 59 when they attended their private session. A small proportion (6.3 per cent) were aged under 30 years.



**Figure 5.1 – Age of all survivors at the time of the private session, May 2013 – May 2017**

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

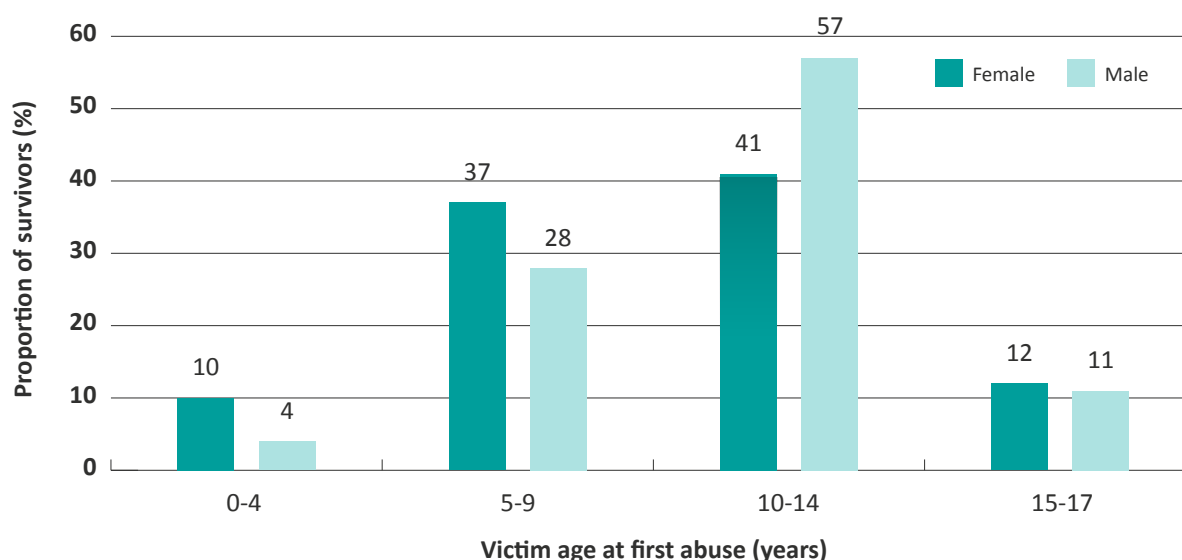
## 3.3 Experiences of abuse

During private sessions, survivors chose what they wanted to share with Commissioners. The majority of survivors did talk about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced as children. They told Commissioners what happened to them, the institutions where it happened and who sexually abused them.

This section reports quantitative information, taking into account the varying numbers of survivors who provided information about the different types of abuse they experienced.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3.1 Nature of the abuse

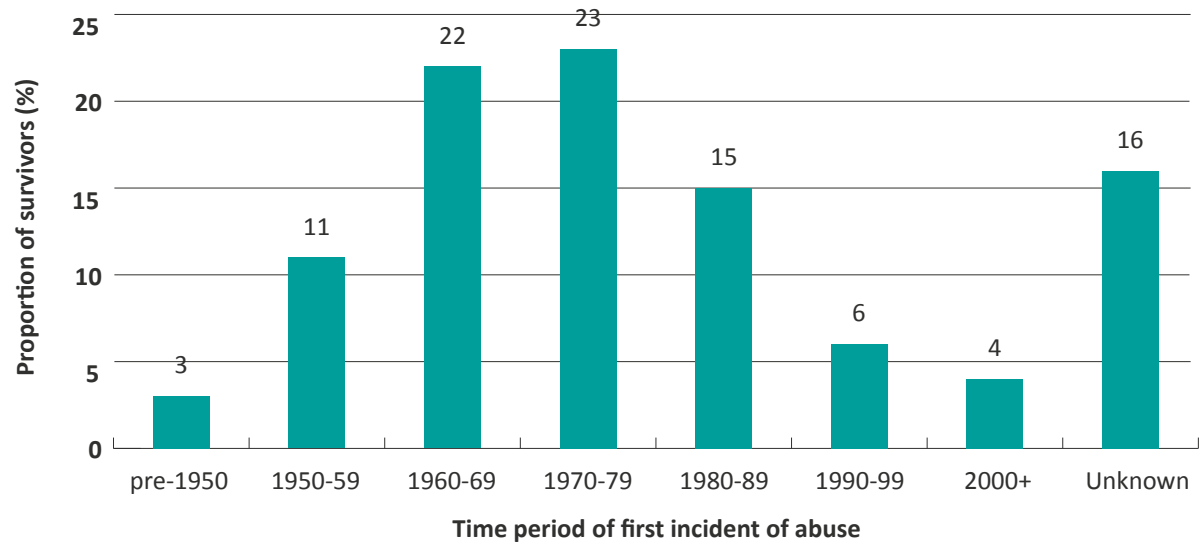
Most survivors in private sessions (85.8 per cent) told Commissioners the age they were when first sexually abused. On average, this group was just over 10 years old when they were first abused. Females (9.7 years) were slightly younger than males (10.7 years). Figure 5.2 shows that a larger proportion of females than males were aged under 10 when they were first abused: 47.0 per cent of females were aged under 10, compared with 31.4 per cent of males.



**Figure 5.2 – Age at first abuse for male and female survivors, excluding unknown, as told to us in private sessions May 2013 – May 2017**

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

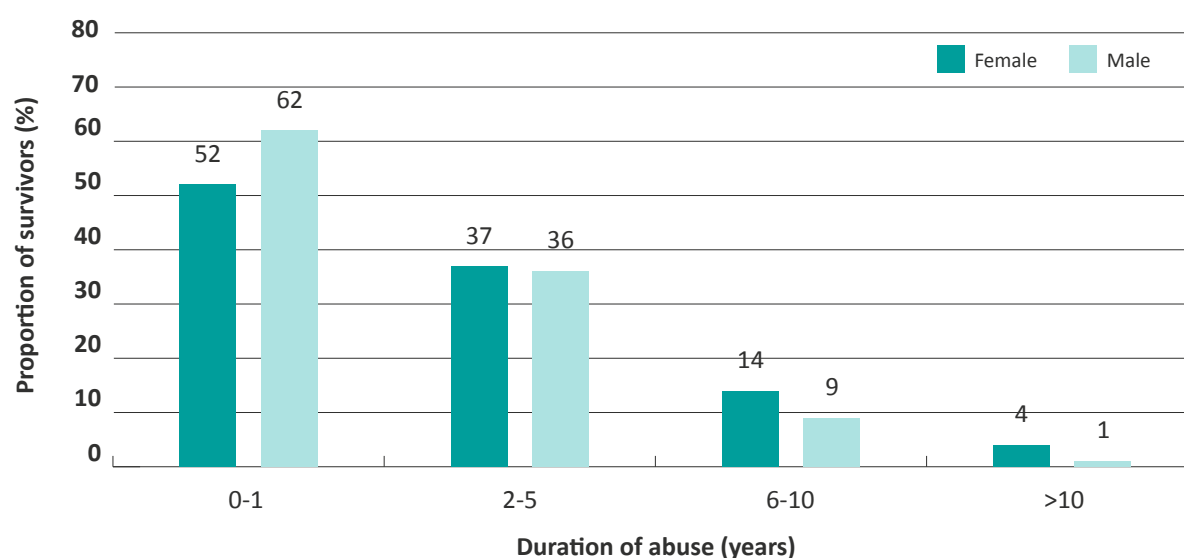
Figure 5.3 shows the time period of first abuse, by decade, for survivors who attended private sessions. Approximately one in three (36.0 per cent) said they were first sexually abused before 1970. Only 4.1 per cent said they were sexually abused after 2000.<sup>35</sup> The largest proportion of survivors (23.0 per cent) told Commissioners their experience of sexual abuse started in the 1970s. A total of 15.8 per cent did not know or did not tell Commissioners the year in which they were first sexually abused.



**Figure 5.3 – Time period of first abuse for all survivors, as told to us in private sessions  
May 2013 – May 2017**

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

Figure 5.4 shows the duration of abuse for male and female survivors. Among survivors who talked to Commissioners about the duration of the abuse, 61.8 per cent of males and 52.3 per cent of females said they were sexually abused for one year or less. Female survivors were more likely than male survivors to report abuse spanning a duration greater than five years.



**Figure 5.4 – Duration of sexual abuse for male and female survivors, as told to us in private sessions May 2013 – May 2017**

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

### 3.3.2 Types of sexual abuse

During private sessions, the majority of survivors (86.8 per cent) told Commissioners about the different types of sexual abuse they experienced as a child. The following section is ordered according to the frequency of sexual abuse experienced, with many survivors indicating they experienced non-penetrative contact abuse, and relatively few indicating they were exposed to other people performing sexual acts as a child. The section concludes with a description of survivors' experiences of other forms of abuse and neglect.

#### Non-penetrative contact abuse

Almost three quarters of survivors (72.6 per cent) who discussed the type of sexual abuse they experienced said they had experienced non-penetrative contact abuse, such as sexual touching of their body or being made to touch the perpetrator's body. Many survivors spoke of contact which may have appeared ambiguous to outside observers but made them feel uncomfortable.



Other survivors described contact with a clear sexual motivation, such as being groped on the bottom, breasts, testicles, penis or vulva. Non-penetrative contact abuse occurred in public and in private, and both outside and under clothes.

As with grooming, survivors described non-penetrative contact abuse as behaviour that may have appeared ambiguous or even legitimate for the purposes of the activity that was being performed, but which they interpreted as having a sexual component. This type of contact abuse was often disguised as coaching, injury management or the provision of comfort and care. One survivor who said he was sexually abused during the 1980s told the Commissioner his parents took him to a medical doctor because he was feeling unwell with a sore throat.<sup>36</sup> He said the doctor saw him privately and instructed him to ‘take your clothes off and lie down’. The survivor said he knew this had nothing to do with a sore throat and it was ‘completely inappropriate’.<sup>37</sup>

## Penetration

Over half of the survivors (55.5 per cent) who spoke about the type of abuse they experienced described experiences of penetrative sexual abuse, such as being anally, vaginally or orally penetrated, with a penis, another body part, or an object. Some survivors told Commissioners they were forced to have sex with other children. Others said they were beaten, tied up and drugged.

## Violations of privacy

Almost one-quarter of survivors (23.9 per cent) who provided information about the type of abuse they experienced told us that the child sexual abuse included violations of their privacy. Violations of privacy we were told about included watching children, or encouraging children to watch each other, when they were in the shower. Some victims were forced to undress in front of someone; many were forced to stand naked for inspection; others were forced to masturbate in front of the perpetrator or child with harmful sexual behaviours. One male survivor, abused in an historical residential institution during the 1960s, described how his experiences of sexual experimentation with other boys at the institution came to the attention of an adult male at the institution.<sup>38</sup> The survivor told the Commissioner the perpetrator had taken him into the perpetrator’s private study and said:

‘I believe you play with yourself.’ I was pretty shocked and I said, ‘Well, yeah’. He said, ‘Well, show me’. That’s how it all started. So it was just straight out, ‘Show me’ and, ‘if you don’t’ – so I did. That’s how it all started.’<sup>39</sup>

In the mid-1960s, 'Freda' was sent by court order to a residential care home in western Sydney.<sup>40</sup> 'Freda' told the Commissioner about the weekly body inspections the matron carried out. After showering, each girl stood at the end of her bed, wearing only a towel. The matron would take the towel away and scrutinise the naked girl, front and back, looking for tattoos, signs of self-harm and other infringements such as plucked eyebrows. She made the girls squat and, wearing surgical gloves, would explore their vaginas with her fingers, 'searching for contraband ... I see that as sexual assault and humiliation – but also psychological assault, with her having complete control over us'.<sup>41</sup>

## Grooming

Of those survivors who mentioned the type of abuse they experienced in private sessions, more than one in five (22.8 per cent) told us they were groomed.<sup>42</sup> Many described grooming as a precursor to child sexual abuse involving penetration, with the perpetrator taking a particular interest in the child and making them feel special. In general, grooming was perpetrated by adults rather than children. Grooming techniques tended to occur over an extended period of time, in what appeared to be an attempt to normalise the extra attention the perpetrator showed towards the child and to gain their trust.

Some survivors told Commissioners the perpetrator groomed their parents, especially when the perpetrator lived with or had close contact with their family. Survivors described perpetrators who paid attention to them and their family, which was often welcomed by family members, especially when the perpetrator held a position of power or status within the institution or community. One male survivor who said he was abused by a Scout leader during the 1980s reflected on the tactics perpetrators use to gain access to children:

They work on the parents to start with, whether it is consciously or subconsciously, I don't know. They gain the parents' trust. The parents give their trust and then they turn their back for a minute and think everything's fine. They think 'I can leave them with this man for a weekend and nothing is going to happen because I trust him, I've judged him, I've seen him, I've met him'. Then once the parents turn their backs or do their own thing that is when they make their move.<sup>43</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners that perpetrators used grooming to build trust with the victim and create distance between them and safe adults. At times, this meant involving children in activities that were not directly sexual, but might get children in trouble if they told others what was going on. Some survivors described how the perpetrator had provided them with cigarettes, drugs and alcohol – activities that made the child feel 'cool'.<sup>44</sup>

At other times, survivors described perpetrators who used seemingly ‘legitimate’ reasons to isolate the child from protective adults. Often, they had agreement from the victim’s parents. Some survivors described perpetrators who offered additional one-on-one sports coaching. One female survivor said of her coach:

He said to my dad, he said, ‘Look, [your daughter] needs some additional stroke training to get her technique better. You go, come back in about an hour, take your son home and come back in about an hour’.<sup>45</sup>

Other survivors described perpetrator behaviours that appeared to be focused on ‘testing’ the victim’s potential responsiveness to sexual abuse. Survivors told Commissioners how perpetrators had touched them in ways they did not consider were necessarily abusive, but were unnecessary given the surrounding context. One male survivor told the Commissioner he was sexually abused at a boarding school during the 1980s. He described how his teacher would ‘sound people out’:

in class or something he would come up and just put his hands on your shoulders and start massaging you. I guess he was judging your level of resistance or, you know, how you reacted to that, whether you were a potential target.<sup>46</sup>

## Exposure to sexual acts and material and sexual exploitation

Child sexual abuse that involved children being exposed to sexual acts and material or sexually exploited was described by survivors less often than grooming, penetrative abuse and non-penetrative contact abuse. Exposure to sexual acts and material can take place in person and online. In person, it includes showing pornographic material to a child, performing sexual acts in front of a child, or sexually exposing genitals to a child. Elements of this can be described as exhibitionism or flashing. In an online environment, it can involve exposing a child to images, sounds, text or games that are sexually explicit. More than one in 10 survivors (12.4 per cent) told us of this kind of abuse.

A small proportion of survivors (2.7 per cent) who discussed the nature of the abuse in private sessions described experiencing child sexual exploitation – that is, being coerced or manipulated into participating in sexual activity in return for something such as food, accommodation, clothing, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money, or an incentive such as love, affection or safety.

Survivors also described perpetrators video recording or photographing sexual acts with children. Some survivors told Commissioners these recordings were made publicly available on the internet. A small number of survivors described being trafficked and sold for sexual purposes or being forced to participate in group sex activities.

## Other forms of abuse and neglect

Over half of survivors (57.3 per cent) told Commissioners about their experiences of other forms of abuse and neglect before, during and after the sexual abuse. Most often, this took the form of physical and emotional abuse. Many survivors who were sexually abused in large residential institutions said they experienced physical abuse, which commonly involved beatings of varying levels of severity. In some cases, the survivor said they had been hospitalised as a result. One male survivor, abused in a boarding school during the 1960s, said he was physically abused as he tried to escape and avoid sexual abuse:

The more I tried to pull away, he's locked on. So I said, 'You dirty bastard', like that, and with that he let – well, you don't call a paedophile a 'dirty bastard'. He let go and he punched the living stuffings out of me, punched me in the stomach, punched me in the testicles, punched me in the groin, then he grabbed hold of my head and he just kept slamming me head up against the wall.<sup>47</sup>

Among survivors who described other forms of abuse and neglect, the majority (80.7 per cent) said they were emotionally abused before, during or after being sexually abused. They told Commissioners how adult perpetrators or children with harmful sexual behaviours created a culture of uncertainty and mistrust, leaving the child to feel that further abuse could occur at any time. Often, emotional abuse involved threats: threats to kill the child's family or to prevent the child from ever seeing their family again; threats more abuse would follow; and threats that the child would go to hell if they disclosed.

Other survivors said that adult perpetrators used shame and guilt to prevent them from disclosing the sexual abuse. Often, they explained, this involved making the child believe the sexual abuse was their fault. Some perpetrators threatened to shame the child's parents if they told. One survivor, abused at a church during the 1970s, described her sense of guilt after disclosing to her mother:

One of my memories of him abusing me was telling me not to tell my mother because it would kill her, and then she subsequently died. I think as a child I sort of had this guilt trip on my mind. I know – but, anyway. But I did tell mum.<sup>48</sup>

Survivors said other forms of emotional abuse were more subtle. The perpetrator may have appeared ‘affectionate’ but made it clear their affection was ‘on a leash’ – that more brutal abuse would ensue if they did not comply with their requests.<sup>49</sup> Some survivors said the perpetrator had badgered them into thinking they were homosexual, and they would ‘out’ them if they did not comply with the abuse.<sup>50</sup> Some told Commissioners of their fear of being seen as gay and their dread of being taunted and humiliated as a consequence.

### 3.3.3 The institutions

Survivors attending private sessions described abuse occurring across a broad range of institution types. About one in five (21.0 per cent) indicated that they had been sexually abused in more than one institution. A total of 5.6 per cent said they had been sexually abused in three or more institutions as a child.

Table 5.2 shows the number and proportion of survivors by the type of institution where they said the sexual abuse occurred. Over one-third of survivors (36.0 per cent) said they had been sexually abused in an historical out-of-home care institution before 1990, such as a residential institution (including children’s home, training farm and reformatory) or family-based out-of-home care arrangement (such as foster care). The experiences of survivors abused in historical residential institutions is explored in more detail in Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*. About one-third of survivors (31.8 per cent) said the abuse took place in a day or boarding school, and 14.5 per cent said they had been sexually abused while they undertook or were involved in religious activities, such as attending a church, temple or synagogue. Full details on the definitions of the institution types is contained in Volume 2, *Nature and cause*.

**Table 5.2 – Number and proportion of survivors by institution type, as told to us in private sessions May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Out-of-home care	2,858	41.6
<i>Historical (pre 1990)</i>	<i>(2,478)</i>	<i>(36.0)</i>
<i>Contemporary (1990 onwards)</i>	<i>(257)</i>	<i>(3.7)</i>
<i>Unknown era</i>	<i>(150)</i>	<i>(2.2)</i>
School	2,186	31.8
Religious activity	1,000	14.5
Youth detention	551	8.0
Recreation, sports and clubs	408	5.9
Health and allied	192	2.8
Armed Forces	76	1.1
Supported accommodation	68	1.0
Family and youth support services	61	0.9
Childcare	32	0.5
Youth employment	17	0.2
Other	213	3.1
Unknown	63	0.9

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

The majority of survivors (58.6 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused in one or more institutions managed by religious organisations. Volume 16, *Religious institutions*, examines these survivors' experiences in more detail. Almost one-third of survivors in private sessions (32.0 per cent) said they had been sexually abused in institutions managed by the government.

Table 5.3 shows the number and proportion of survivors who said they were sexually abused in religious-managed institutions according to the particular religious organisation they identified as responsible for managing it. The table shows that 2,489 survivors said they were sexually abused in a religious institution managed by the Catholic Church, representing 61.8 per cent of survivors who said they were abused in a religious-managed institution and 36.2 per cent of all survivors of child sexual abuse who participated in private sessions. The 594 survivors who indicated they were sexually abused in an institution affiliated with the Anglican Church represents 14.7 per cent of survivors abused in religious-managed institutions and 8.6 per cent of all survivors in private sessions.

**Table 5.3 – Number and proportion of survivors by institutions under religious management, as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), as told to us in private sessions May 2013 – May 2017**

Management of religious institution where child sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in religious-managed institutions	Proportion of all survivors
Catholic	2489	61.8	36.2
Anglican	594	14.7	8.6
Salvation Army	294	7.3	4.3
Protestant	169	4.2	2.5
Presbyterian and Reformed	117	2.9	1.7
Uniting Church	97	2.4	1.4
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	75	1.9	1.1
Jehovah's Witnesses	70	1.7	1.0
Baptist	40	1.0	0.6
Pentecostal	37	0.9	0.5
Brethren	33	0.8	0.5
Churches of Christ	29	0.7	0.4
Judaism	25	0.6	0.4
Seventh-day Adventist	25	0.6	0.4
Lutheran	22	0.5	0.3
Latter-day Saints	7	0.2	0.1
Miscellaneous religions <sup>b</sup>	7	0.2	0.1
Islam	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Baha'i	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Eastern Orthodox	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Hinduism	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Oriental Orthodox	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Unknown	20	0.5	0.3

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

<sup>b</sup> 'Miscellaneous religions' includes but is not limited to Scientology, The Family and Satanism. These non-Christian groups are not coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

### 3.3.4 Adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours

The vast majority of survivors (93.8 per cent) indicated in their private session that they were sexually abused by one or more males. Just over one in 10 (10.9 per cent) said they were sexually abused by one or more females. A total of 36.3 per cent said they had been sexually abused by more than one person.

Most survivors (67.3 per cent) knew or could estimate the age of the perpetrator. Among these survivors, 83.8 per cent said they were abused by an adult, and 24.4 per cent said they were abused by a child.

#### Adult perpetrators

Survivors often described adult perpetrators as charming, charismatic and popular with children and adults. Many survivors believed perpetrators were often perceived by outside observers as people who went ‘above and beyond’ to engage children in activities that appeared to be of benefit to them and their families.

Most adult perpetrators held some form of authority over the victim within the institution where the sexual abuse occurred. The various positions or roles held by perpetrators are described in Table 5.4. Some perpetrators held multiple roles within an institution (for example, teacher and priest). In general, the Royal Commission recorded only the ‘primary’ role (for example, teacher rather than priest if the victim was abused in a school).



**Table 5.4 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, number and proportion all survivors May 2013 – May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	6,564	95.5
Unknown	311	4.5
<i>Of known (n=6,564)<sup>a</sup></i>		
Person in religious ministry	2,113	32.2
Teacher	1,378	21.0
Residential care worker	902	13.7
Foster carer	744	11.3
Dormitory or house master	401	6.1
Custodial staff	384	5.9
Ancillary staff	266	4.1
Medical practitioner	251	3.8
Volunteer at institution	199	3.0
Youth group leader	179	2.7
Sporting coach	145	2.2
Family member	140	2.1
Adult attending institution	67	1.0
Stranger	54	0.8
Police	49	0.7
Church lay leader	26	0.4
Caseworker	21	0.3
Long day care carer	12	0.2
Other <sup>b</sup>	1,974	30.1

<sup>a</sup> *n* denotes the total number of survivors who provided information on the issue.

<sup>b</sup> 'Other' includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were abused by a child.

Note: See Appendix N for further quantitative information.

The majority of survivors (95.5 per cent) discussed the role of the perpetrator who abused them. One-third (32.2 per cent) of this group said they were abused by a person in religious ministry (that is, a minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, Salvation Army officer, church elder, religious brother or sister, and any other person recognised as a spiritual leader in a religious institution). One fifth (21.0 per cent) said they were abused by a teacher and 6.1 per cent said they were abused by a dormitory or house master. Many survivors told Commissioners they were abused by perpetrators associated with the provision of out-of-home care, such as residential care workers (13.7 per cent) or foster carers (11.3 per cent).

Survivors commonly described adult perpetrators as being assertive, bold and confident, as well as aggressive and physically overpowering when away from public view. Many survivors told Commissioners perpetrators were controlling and used bullying techniques. Some survivors described adult perpetrators becoming jealous or controlling of victims' time and social networks. This was more common when the adult perpetrator perceived the child sexual abuse as 'romance'.

Many survivors described adult perpetrators' use of manipulation and deceit before, during and after the sexual abuse. In some cases, adult perpetrators blamed children for their sexual arousal, often leaving the children with a sense of guilt. In other cases, survivors told Commissioners that adult perpetrators manipulated them into believing they could provide a safe haven from other perpetrators and bullies in the institution or in the victim's family. One survivor said the teacher who abused him had told him the school was 'out to get him'.<sup>51</sup> Under the guise of offering the student a safe place to do his homework, the teacher would invite the student into his office and lock the door. The survivor said the teacher would make him use the computer while the teacher sexually abused him.<sup>52</sup>

## Children with harmful sexual behaviours

As previously noted, of the survivors who provided information on the age of the person who sexually abused them, 24.4 per cent said they had been abused by another child. Most of this abuse occurred in schools or in historical residential institutions, such as children's homes or orphanages.

Survivors sexually abused by children with harmful sexual behaviours commonly told Commissioners the abuse was conducted in the context of bullying and harassment. In many cases, the bullying and harassment was violent and the child exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours was older and held a higher status within the institution. In most cases, the abuse occurred outside of the view of adults or other children, though in some instances other children were present. One mother attended a private session to describe her son's experience of being sexually abused by another child while on a school camp.<sup>53</sup> She told the Commissioner the sexual abuse was witnessed by a number of children and was perpetrated by two children known for their 'disturbed and violent' behaviour.<sup>54</sup>

A small proportion of survivors told Commissioners they had been sexually abused by a female child. In most of these cases, the abuse did not have the physical violence associated with sexual abuse by male children with harmful sexual behaviours. The exception to this was the bullying experienced by some survivors in girls' reformatories and orphanages. The female children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours were often older and of higher status in the institution than the victim. Female children exhibiting these behaviours also tended to couch the sexual abuse as 'romance'. One parent told the Commissioner about her daughter's experience:

in the morning there'd be, 'You know what's happening this afternoon', a wink, a pat on the bum during recess, various things like that. When they went home, she cornered my daughter and touched her above the clothing, not under the clothing. She used words along the lines that 'This is a love game' and 'This is how I show you I love you'.<sup>55</sup>

In this instance, the victim reportedly 'put up with it' because the other child was her close friend, despite the abuse making her feel uncomfortable.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.3.5 How children tried to avoid the abuse and protect themselves

Many survivors described how they were left to protect themselves from child sexual abuse, and the efforts they made to do so. Commissioners heard often from survivors that they believed other adults must have known or suspected the abuse was occurring but survivors rarely spoke of attempts by adults to prevent or stop it. In the context of a power imbalance between themselves and an adult perpetrator or an older child, many survivors were left with few options to stop the abuse.

Some survivors said the best protective strategy was to act in a way that was 'compliant'.<sup>57</sup> Compliance was especially common when the perpetrator or child with harmful sexual behaviours became aggressive, or threatened to become aggressive when the victim resisted. In particular, survivors who were sexually abused in closed institutions in which children had little contact with people outside, told Commissioners, they soon became compliant after learning the hard way how helpless they were.<sup>58</sup> One male survivor, abused in an historical residential institution during the 1960s, described how he learned to survive during the abuse:

I learned to survive and so I was compliant. Some of the other guys were viciously bashed and raped and all that sort of stuff. He did threaten me, otherwise I wouldn't have done it. I was in fear and, as I said, I needed to do what I could to survive.<sup>59</sup>

Other survivors described their attempts at running away. Often, these children were returned to the institution by police or child welfare authorities. Occasionally, parents responded to their child's actions and took protective steps, even if they did not know their child had been abused. One survivor, abused at a boarding school during the 1960s, described his father's reaction after he found out about his son's repeated attempts to run away:

I went home and my old man said to me, 'If you're going to run away all the time, not much good sending you bloody back, might as well stay at home'. So they let me stay home. And to be honest, that was the best words I ever heard my old man say.<sup>60</sup>

## 3.4 Circumstances at the time of abuse

---

Analysis of survivors' experiences revealed child sexual abuse often occurred in similar contexts and under similar circumstances. Some survivors suggested particular circumstances may have increased their vulnerability to abuse. These circumstances were rarely directly related to the child. This section looks at how survivors described their family circumstances and how these, together with the wider social and institutional contexts in which the abuse occurred, may have contributed to their vulnerability to child sexual abuse.

### 3.4.1 Social and cultural context

Survivors commonly described a social context where children had little value, were voiceless, had few rights, were readily dismissed and were not considered worthy of any privacy or respect. Many told Commissioners that the prevailing view was that 'children were to be seen and not heard'. The lack of respect for children was intensified for children with disability (see Chapter 7), children in historical residential institutions (see Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*) and children in youth detention (see Chapter 8 of this volume and Volume 15, *Contemporary detention environments*). With few exceptions, these themes were broadly consistent regardless of the historical period in which the sexual abuse first occurred.

The low value placed on children's voices was reflected in adults' attitudes towards children when they tried to disclose sexual abuse. Many survivors told Commissioners they were not listened to or believed when they attempted to disclose sexual abuse. There were few accounts in private sessions of adults, either internal or external to the institution, conducting investigations by interviewing the children involved. When investigations did occur, the adults were generally cursory, dismissive, unbelieving and uninterested. In some cases, survivors described how institutions or perpetrators coerced them into misleading investigators to cover up the abuse which had occurred. Other survivors recounted that the investigations were conducted in the presence of adults who made them feel uncomfortable, anxious or scared.

Some survivors also described a social context where parents' views and actions were devalued, especially if their children were in out-of-home care. Stories of parents being supportive and protective were rare and confined mostly to victims who were abused in more recent decades. When parents did take protective action, survivors commonly said institutions withheld information, restricting their capacity to make informed decisions about their children's safety. In some cases, legislation and court processes limited parents' involvement and their right to intervene.

Some survivors believed the high social value placed on institutions may have increased their vulnerability to abuse. Institutions were afforded status, respect and power because of their place in society. Survivors said they felt powerless to speak out, and if they did, no one would have believed them. As one male survivor, abused while he participated in religious activities during the 1960s, described:

At that time, the Church had an unquestioned position of honour and respect and couldn't really be challenged ... so there was no openness, and certainly no encouragement to be open and to discuss issues around the Church. I think that created a culture of secrecy which wasn't conducive to raising these sorts of problems. To question the honour of a priest in those days was a pretty fundamental issue.<sup>61</sup>

Other survivors suggested society's unquestioning respect for institutions led people outside of them to behave in 'tokenistic' ways when it came to holding them to account. Some survivors believed police and child protection staff had been notified of the abuse, but did nothing to investigate or stop it. Many survivors told Commissioners that while the police knew what had happened to them, they never asked why or did anything to protect them. Each time they ran away, the police would take them straight back to the institution. Sometimes the police abused children or thought they deserved to be punished. 'Ethel' explained to the Commissioner:

We ran away a couple of times ... And the policeman ... he picked us up ... we told him 'help me'. He called us little sluts and little liars and 'ya just need a good floggin' and he took us back there. I actually got that, plus more.<sup>62</sup>

Other survivors understood authorities had investigated the abuse, but were told these authorities were powerless to act. One male survivor who said he was abused in an historical residential institution during the 1960s described his experience with police and child welfare workers after he had run away.<sup>63</sup> Adults in the institution punished him for running away after the welfare workers left.

That's what it was like with the child welfare. They'd come up when something went wrong, talk about it, whatever, in the matron's office. Then the welfare officer would leave and the matron would deal with you.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.4.2 Institutional context

Many survivors described the characteristics of the institutions where they were sexually abused. Most of these survivors perceived a connection between the institutional context and their vulnerability to abuse.

There were some differences across survivors' descriptions of institutions depending on the time period in which the sexual abuse first occurred, as well as whether they experienced sexual abuse in a residential or non-residential setting. The observed relationship between the time period and institutional setting is largely consistent with the changes to the provision of out-of-home care in Australia that gradually came into effect in the late 1960s and 1970s. Historically, many children in out-of-home care were placed in residential institutions such as orphanages, children's homes and reformatories.<sup>65</sup> More recently, children in out-of-home care have commonly been placed in family-based care such as foster and kinship/relative care (see Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care*). The transition was not immediate and occurred at different times for different groups of children. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children with disability remained in large residential institutions while other children were being transitioned into family-based out-of-home care.

Some residential institutions, such as youth detention and boarding schools, continued to operate in a consistent way across time periods. Many survivors abused in these institutions described situations and circumstances more commonly associated with the larger historical residential institutions in operation before changes to the out-of-home care system took place. Where differences in survivor accounts of institutional context emerged, they appeared to be more related to the residential or non-residential nature of the institution – that is, whether the child lived at the institution – than to changes in institutional contexts over time. Where differences between survivors' accounts of institutional context appeared to be linked to the time period, this has been noted.

Many survivors who were abused in residential institutions said they had very limited contact with people or organisations outside of the institution. These survivors commonly said adults within the institutions rarely expressed love, understanding or compassion for children. This was especially the case when the child had been in an historical residential institution although it was also mentioned – albeit less often – by children in contemporary out-of-home care. These survivors believed adult 'carers' acted with impunity and thought no one cared about the wellbeing of children in out-of-home care. Some perceived their carers rationalised their unethical and immoral behaviour by regarding these children as 'nobodies'.<sup>66</sup>

Survivors of child sexual abuse in historical and contemporary forms of out-of-home care commonly told Commissioners that institutional apathy towards children in out-of-home care extended to their birth families. The effect of this apathy differed across time. In closed institutions during the 1950s and 1960s in particular, the rights of children and birth parents were often actively disregarded. Many survivors abused in historical residential institutions

believed institutional policy restricted, and at times completely prohibited, potentially protective adults' engagement with children. Preventing parents' access to their children contributed to children's isolation and narrowed external accountability for what was occurring in the institution. In contrast, children in contemporary out-of-home care more commonly told Commissioners they were allowed access to their birth parents, though they still felt their parents' views were disregarded. These children sometimes used visits with parents as an opportunity – either indirectly or directly – to disclose details of child sexual abuse.

In some cases, survivors told Commissioners they believed the loveless environment within residential institutions created a culture where children sought attention and affection from each other. Some survivors believed this normalised sexual contact between children and may have made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse by children. One male survivor who lived in an historical residential institution during the 1960s said it was normal for eight-year-old boys to have sex with 15-year-old girls.<sup>67</sup> He told the Commissioner: 'That was just common. That's what happened living under that situation. I think a lot of it was looking for love from someone. I really do think that's what it was about'.<sup>68</sup>

Survivors sexually abused in residential institutions commonly recounted that adults wielded great power and control over children's lives. Children were not respected or consulted about what was happening to them and had very little access to privacy. Some survivors commented this created an environment of uncertainty. Adults, and sometimes other children, used this uncertainty to intimidate, frighten and humiliate children. One male survivor, abused in an historical residential institution during the 1940s, described to the Commissioner his constant anxiety over being called into 'the boss's office':

They had a microphone system and they were immediately called to attention.  
We dreaded the fear of being called into the boss's office ... He was absolutely cruel ...  
We were scared. We lived in an uncertain fear of intimidation.<sup>69</sup>

In some respects, survivors' descriptions of the institutional context were similar regardless of the time period in which the sexual abuse occurred. Many survivors who were sexually abused before 1990 said harsh physical punishment and abuse by adults towards children was tolerated and sometimes endorsed by the institution. Reports of physical punishment were not confined to survivors in residential institutions. However, survivors abused in large residential institutions were more likely to describe widespread physical abuse, affecting all children within the institution. Survivors abused in non-residential institutions, and especially those abused during the 1980s and after, more commonly told Commissioners that perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours separated them from the main group and conducted physical abuse and punishment in private. Many survivors, regardless of where or when the abuse occurred, noted the consequences of this physical abuse – such as visible bruising – were ignored by adults in authority at the institution. They told Commissioners this created an institutional culture where abuse was normalised and children could not depend on adults for protection.

Many survivors described institutional cultures that directly or indirectly seemed to endorse bullying and harmful sexual behaviours between children. Some survivors abused in large historical residential institutions believed the widespread and visible use of physical punishment by adults may have normalised bullying and harmful sexual behaviours between children. Survivors who experienced sexual abuse in more recent decades – during and after the 1980s –commonly indicated that people in authority within institutions ‘turned a blind eye’ to bullying. They said this attitude may have led children within the institution to believe bullying was acceptable.

While bullying and sexual abuse were mentioned in private sessions by survivors across time and in all types of institutions, survivors abused in the larger historical residential institutions also described a sense of solidarity between children and that other children sometimes acted as a source of protection and support. Protection included warnings from peers to avoid certain people, and helping with homework for children who were having difficulty with schoolwork and were being targeted for abuse. One male survivor described his experience of witnessing the abuse of a young peer:

That four-year-old boy would look into my eyes and I would look into his eyes while he was getting flogged by the women. He never shed a tear. He stared into my eyes until it stopped. I didn’t stop looking at his eyes until it stopped. We were scared from the minute we woke up until the minute we fell asleep.<sup>70</sup>

Survivors abused in non-residential institutions after about 1970 were more likely to reveal in a private session that other children did not act in ways that supported them during the abuse. From what these survivors said to Commissioners there was a sense that victims had expected other children to be supportive and protective. When this did not occur, survivors believed it may have contributed to their trauma. In some cases victims were ostracised by peers after the abuse became known.

Despite the large number of survivors who told Commissioners that adults in a position of authority in the institution did not protect children, we also heard several accounts of adults acting in a protective manner. One survivor, abused in a school during the 1960s, described these adults as ‘courageous people who did try to protect children’.<sup>71</sup> Most survivors told Commissioners they believed adults who stood up for children risked being reprimanded or losing their job.



### 3.4.3 Family circumstances

Survivors described a range of family circumstances that provided the context for the abuse. While many survivors described coming from families where domestic violence and substance misuse were common, others described coming from loving families who were overly trusting of institutions.

#### Family relationships

Many survivors described coming from families where neglect, violence and abuse were common. Some survivors felt this may have increased their vulnerability to abuse, as perpetrators may have targeted them knowing their parents paid little attention to their welfare. Some survivors described situations where they believed their parents and other family members noticed their unusual behaviour, but did nothing in response. One survivor said she came from a large family in which many of the children had been sexually abused.<sup>72</sup> The survivor believed her parents were 'distracted' and did not know what to do when confronted with their children's behaviour:

When I was a very small child, I used to get in a cupboard. If I could get in a cupboard, I would go and hide, because my family were a bit nuts because all of these things that had been happening. The whole family was in distress and trauma and no one knew why. There's my poor parents, especially my mother, trying to make sense of these completely bloody weird traumatic behaviours from her children and she didn't know what to do. She knew something was wrong, but she didn't know what to do.<sup>73</sup>

Other survivors told Commissioners they came from loving, supportive and open families. However, this was not always enough to protect children from abuse. Some parents noticed their child's behaviour had changed, questioned them about it, and believed them when they said nothing was wrong. One mother who attended a private session described how she had an affectionate relationship with her son and often told him she loved him.<sup>74</sup> One day her son reacted violently to her affection:

One day when he came home for the weekend he just threw my hands up and I went back against the fridge. I said, '[male victim], what's the matter?' He said, 'Nothing, mum, just don't touch me'. I talked to him later about it. I said, 'That was a very strong reaction, mate. I didn't do anything that I haven't done to you a thousand times. What is it that's changed?' He said, 'I just don't like it anymore, mum'.

Well, because he was growing older, I thought maybe it's time I did start changing my tactics and maybe it's just the pat on the back or whatever ... You do see these behaviours, but you're also recognising that your child is commencing through adolescence and that's quite a volatile time. [And] because you're also a mother and you think 'I've kept my child safe' ... he's saying this hasn't happened, [and] you don't go around thinking all the time your child is being sexually abused. I asked [my son]. He emphatically denied it. So I believed him.<sup>75</sup>

In other cases, parents did recognise something was wrong and acted to protect their child. Some survivors believed in these cases, their parents' actions may have prevented the abuse from continuing. Other attempts at action were hampered by the nature of the institution or the parent's relationship with their child. Some parents described how they had become aware of the sexual abuse their child was experiencing while in out-of-home care. These parents told Commissioners their attempts to get authorities to listen and to remove the child from the placement were ignored.

## Devotion and loyalty to the institution

Many survivors told Commissioners they came from families who had a deep trust in and loyalty to the institution where they were sexually abused. They believed this trust and devotion may have 'blinded' otherwise loving and supportive parents from recognising the changes in their children's behaviour resulting from the abuse. The mother of a victim who was abused in a religious school setting in the 2000s described with regret the trust she and her husband had in the perpetrator and the church.<sup>76</sup> She said they had not noticed their daughter was being groomed and abused:

when we gave the chronological report to the police officer, and we wrote down events that [had] happened ... writing it down and reading it, it really breaks your heart as parents. We've made a lot of mistakes, and we trusted people that we never should have ever trusted. When [the police officer] read the report, he questioned me, 'Why didn't you act here? Why didn't you act?' There were points in time that we could have done something, but we didn't understand grooming and we didn't understand the nature, and we trusted in the church and their employees.<sup>77</sup>

Survivors often said their family's affiliation with the institution prevented them from disclosing the abuse. Many thought they would not be believed. Some survivors felt that by disclosing the details of the sexual abuse, they would embarrass their parents and bring shame on their family in the eyes of the community. These survivors felt that they 'protected' their family's honour by not disclosing. They also preserved their family's trust in the institution.

Many survivors commented that their parents were held in high regard by the institution and this afforded their family a degree of status within the community. It also established a dynamic where children felt isolated and disempowered, because their parents were friends or colleagues with the perpetrator and other members of the institution. It was often the case that parents would invite high-profile members from the institution into their homes. In retrospect, survivors said they now realise the perpetrator was grooming them and their family. This scenario appeared very common when the perpetrator was a trusted member of a religious institution. A number of survivors remembered what a ‘great honour’ it was to be able to demonstrate some close connection with Catholic priests, especially if they were considered a ‘friend of the family’.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.4.4 Personal characteristics

Some survivors described personal characteristics they believed made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse. All these factors were outside the control of the child. It is important to emphasise that sexual abuse is never the fault of the child.

#### Limited understanding about sex, sexuality and child sexual abuse

Many survivors believed their lack of understanding about sex and sexuality as a child contributed to them being vulnerable to sexual abuse. They described how they felt confused about what was happening to them and did not understand it was sexual abuse. This was especially the case when perpetrators used grooming tactics to prepare the child for sexual abuse. Some survivors said they found it difficult as a child to distinguish ‘special attention’ from sexual abuse. Others had some awareness that what was happening was not ‘right’, but did not know how to act in a way to protect themselves from the sexual abuse.

As children, some survivors thought sexualised behaviour – between adults and children, and among children – was normal. This was especially true for children living in historical residential institutions and some boarding schools. Survivors from these institutions thought perpetrators may have targeted them because, as a child, they had displayed sexualised behaviour or emotional ‘neediness’. These survivors said they often experienced a sense of shame and self-blame because they believed they had invited or encouraged the sexual abuse. One female survivor, abused in out-of-home care during the 1980s, described how she left notes on her teacher’s car:

I don’t even know what they said – just, ‘Hello, I want to talk to you’, or something ridiculous. I don’t know ... So I did pursue him. I’m not going to say I didn’t, because I did. I was pursuing something ... someone to look after me, or some awful kind of pathological thing maybe ... it was inappropriate what he did, but I did make myself known that I was looking for someone – something.<sup>79</sup>

## Isolation and bullying

In many cases, children were isolated – either physically or socially – at the time they were sexually abused. Children were often isolated physically when they attended boarding school, were in youth detention or living in out-of-home care. Some survivors also believed they had been vulnerable to sexual abuse because they were socially isolated and considered ‘different’ to other children. Some believed perpetrators targeted them because they appeared introverted or withdrawn. Others told Commissioners they were targeted because the perpetrator knew they would not report the abuse. One male survivor described his sense of inferiority to other children at school because he was living in out-of-home care while his peers had ‘normal’ families. He said:

I always felt like a misfit as a child. I felt deep shame and continual embarrassment when taking my place amongst other children at school because my home situation was radically different to theirs. As a direct result I was marked out as constitutionally different from other children and this resulted in extreme shyness and eventual withdrawal resulting in an overwhelming inferiority complex.<sup>80</sup>

The effect of social isolation was not confined to disadvantaged children. A number of survivors described themselves as having held high-status positions within the institution, such as an elite sportsperson or school prefect. The high-status position placed them in situations where they could often be isolated by the perpetrator under seemingly legitimate pretexts. One male survivor described how his position as prefect in a residential out-of-home care facility came with a curtained-off room in the dormitory. He believed the perpetrator identified him as being isolated – ‘a solo man, so to speak’.<sup>81</sup>

## 3.5 Experiences of disclosure

---

Survivors’ descriptions of their disclosure of child sexual abuse revealed it was not a one-off event. Some survivors intentionally disclosed the details of the sexual abuse during childhood or as an adult. Others had the details of the abuse discovered by someone else or only disclosed after they were asked. Of those who discussed who they disclosed to, one in 10 (10.3 per cent) disclosed for the first time to the Royal Commission.

Survivors’ accounts suggest adults often responded poorly to disclosures of child sexual abuse. Sometimes parents, partners and close friends supported the survivor following a disclosure, but institutional responses to disclosures of child sexual abuse were almost always negative.

Section 3.5.1 describes survivors' descriptions of the circumstances of disclosure, specifically for those who disclosed as children and those who disclosed as adults, which were often very different experiences. Section 3.5.2 discusses barriers survivors said may have prevented full disclosure. Some of these barriers were felt most keenly as a child, others as an adult. Others were shared by many survivors of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, regardless of when they chose to disclose.

### 3.5.1 Circumstances of disclosure

Most survivors (88.9 per cent) told Commissioners how long they took to formally disclose the details of the abuse. Among these survivors, over half (57.4 per cent) said they disclosed as an adult, leaving 42.6 per cent who said they disclosed as a child.

#### Disclosure to adults as a child

Survivors' experiences of disclosing sexual abuse to an adult as a child were mostly negative, especially if the abuse and disclosure occurred before 1990. Initial poor responses to a disclosure often had the effect of silencing victims and many took several decades to speak of the sexual abuse again. Some survivors said they were beaten when they tried to disclose. Based on what we heard in private sessions, physical beatings were most commonly experienced by children who were living in historical residential institutions and who disclosed to someone in authority at the institution.

Other survivors described dismissive or indifferent responses when they disclosed to someone in authority at the institution. These survivors told Commissioners they were laughed at and told to 'toughen up'. One male survivor told the Commissioner he was abused at an historical residential institution during the 1960s. He said he approached a senior member of the institution with his friend to disclose:

Me and this mate went up and told him and he laughed at us and said, 'You haven't seen the worst of it yet, so bloody well get used to it'. And, you know, that was it. Basically, he walked away.<sup>82</sup>

Dismissing and ridiculing children was not confined to people in authority at the institution or to 'historical' attempts at disclosure. Some survivors told Commissioners that their parents did not fully understand the nature of child sexual abuse or its impacts. These parents had the attitude that the children should 'just get over it'.<sup>83</sup> Some survivors of relatively recent abuse said their parents downplayed the abuse or punished them by throwing them out of home. One female survivor, who said she was abused at a sporting club during the 1990s, told the Commissioner her mother had ridiculed her in front of a friend after she confided in her:

they were sitting there and she said something like, ‘Oh yeah, [my daughter] reckons [male perpetrator] was inappropriate with her’. I can’t remember the exact wording, but it was something similar to that. ‘What a stupid thing to say.’ They just laughed it off, totally disregarded it.<sup>84</sup>

Other survivors described institutional responses to their childhood disclosure as appearing to support the victim, but actually doing nothing to protect them from further abuse. These survivors told Commissioners they initially thought the institution had ‘heard’ their disclosure, but later found out no action had been taken. Several survivors who had been sexually abused in a school setting said the respective perpetrators had been dismissed and re-hired the following year. Another female survivor told the Commissioner she became pregnant as a result of the sexual abuse. One of her teachers supported her to terminate the pregnancy, but did nothing to prevent future abuse.

Parents who attended private sessions to describe their children’s experience of abuse often told Commissioners they noticed changes in their child’s behaviour, which prompted them to ask whether something had happened. Some parents were confused as to whether the changes were normal teenage behaviour. However, as noted earlier, even direct questions were no guarantee the child would disclose. One mother told the Commissioner she had asked her son what was troubling him at the time of the abuse, but it had taken several decades for him to finally disclose.<sup>85</sup> In this instance, the perpetrator had convinced the child that the sexual abuse was his fault and the survivor carried this belief with him into his thirties:

When he told me, I said, ‘Had that happened when I asked you?’ He said, ‘Yes mum, but I couldn’t tell you. I was told not to tell you, that you would be disgusted with me because I was at fault, I was to blame’.<sup>86</sup>

Other parents believed their children when they disclosed but found it difficult to respond appropriately. This was especially common in earlier time periods and when the child’s parents were disadvantaged or did not have a position of authority within society or the institution. Parents of children in out-of-home care said they tried to get their children removed from unsafe placements but no one listened to their demands. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in particular often felt their pleas were ignored.

Survivors sexually abused in recent decades more commonly described a supportive response to childhood disclosures, at least from parents. In many of these more recent cases, parents attempted to shield their children from the consequences of disclosure. Survivors described how their parents had protected them after they were ostracised when the institutional community discovered – and did not believe – the allegations of child sexual abuse. Other survivors told Commissioners their parents had initiated civil proceedings against the institution and, as far as possible, tried not to involve them in this process.

Disclosure by survivors that they had been sexually abused by another child received a mixed response. Many survivors, especially those who had been abused in more recent decades, said that their parents had believed them when they disclosed and had taken action to stop it from happening again. However, institutional responses to sexual abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours were almost uniformly negative. When investigations did occur, they tended to be internally driven and survivors perceived little was done to adequately address the harmful sexual behaviours.

## Disclosure as an adult

Survivors in private sessions who disclosed as adults often told people to whom they were closest. This was most commonly partners or parents. Responses to these disclosures were mixed. Some survivors, especially those who disclosed before about 1990, told Commissioners they received negative reactions. They said that their friends and family did not believe them or held negative and stereotyped views about what it meant to be a victim of child sexual abuse. One survivor told us about his experience of abuse in an historical residential institution in the 1950s. He described what happened after he told his friends:

I thought I'd trust people, [I'd think] 'I can trust this person, tell them what happened'. They'd say, 'My God, don't let him near your kids,' you know. So, there you go, you've lost a whole lot of friends. I've made that mistake three or four times and in the end I just gave up, stuck to myself.<sup>87</sup>

During adulthood, disclosures of past sexual abuse sometimes occurred after experiencing a 'trigger' event. Trigger events were sometimes unexpected, random events, such as seeing the perpetrator on the street or hearing about the institution where the abuse occurred in the media. Other triggers were life events such as the birth of a child, a child reaching a similar age to that when the survivor was sexually abused, and experiencing a relationship breakdown. In many cases, trigger events resulted in distress which prompted the survivor to re-evaluate their lives. One survivor described her experience of disclosure:

I think at the time I sat down and said, 'Okay, what's going on?' I'd come out of a long-term lesbian relationship and I just sat there and thought, 'I just don't want to be anything. I just want to be me'. That's when it all sort of came to me. I guess I started to tell people, my father, siblings.<sup>88</sup>

In some cases, survivors told Commissioners they had begun treatment with psychologists or counsellors with the intent of disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse. Others disclosed after they established a trusting relationship with a counsellor while receiving psychological support for other issues, such as depression or substance abuse. Full disclosures to counsellors, especially initially, were not common. Many survivors said they told only parts of the detail, or 'sabotaged' their sessions because they were not ready to discuss the abuse.<sup>89</sup> One female survivor who said she was sexually abused by a Scout leader in the 1990s spoke of her difficulty disclosing:

And after all those drug and alcohol places, it's pretty obvious why I was acting out, cutting and drinking and doing drugs. Like, they knew, but I could never sort of talk about it because I just felt so ashamed.<sup>90</sup>

Of those survivors who provided information about who they disclosed to, about one in five told Commissioners they had disclosed to police. These disclosures often occurred after survivors had already told a partner, parent, counsellor or lawyer. Most survivors who told police wanted to see the perpetrator charged with child sexual abuse. Responses from police were mixed: some survivors had a positive experience, and described the police response as professional and compassionate. For many of these survivors, the perpetrator was charged and found guilty. When this was not the case, survivors mostly felt the police had done as much as they were able.

Other survivors found their disclosure to police upsetting and invalidating. They said police did not follow up on the disclosure or did not follow up in the way the survivor had expected. Many survivors found it difficult to deal with police decisions not to proceed with criminal charges against the perpetrator. Other survivors were frustrated with the administrative processes involved in making a formal disclosure and some felt they 'shouldn't have bothered'.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.5.2 Barriers to disclosure

In some respects, children and adults experienced similar barriers to disclosure. Regardless of their life stage, many victims and survivors felt a deep sense of shame and embarrassment about their experience of sexual abuse. This often prevented children and adults from telling others what they had experienced or meant they told only parts of the story. Other barriers to disclosure were felt more acutely either during childhood or as an adult. Threats, punishment and confusion about what had occurred were common during childhood. Many adult survivors who delayed disclosure said they were not ready to deal with the consequences.



## Shame and embarrassment

Two-thirds of survivors (66.8 per cent) told Commissioners what had prevented them from disclosing the details of their child sexual abuse. Of this group, 41.0 per cent said shame and embarrassment were barriers to disclosure. Survivors often said they felt embarrassed talking about sex and sexuality with their parents. Many were motivated by a need to protect their parents. Some told Commissioners they could never disclose until their parents were dead because 'it would kill them'.<sup>92</sup> One survivor told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by two priests visiting her Catholic primary school and by another two priests during her time at a Catholic high school.<sup>93</sup> She explained why she never mentioned the abuse to her parents at the time: 'I never wanted my mother to know because I never wanted her to be in so much pain. She scrubbed floors all her life to send me to that school'.<sup>94</sup>

Survivors often feared humiliation should their experience of sexual abuse become public. This was especially common for male survivors who feared being labelled as homosexual or as a perpetrator of sexual abuse themselves. One male survivor, describing his experience of abuse in an historical residential institution in the 1950s, said:

To me it is the stigma that you're a poofter or you know ... And I know I'm not, but there's also the other stigma that you've got to live with, and that's because you've been molested you're going to molest someone else.<sup>95</sup>

Other survivors said they felt guilty about the abuse and that somehow they were responsible. These feelings sometimes prevented them from disclosing as a child or limited the amount of information they were comfortable sharing. Some survivors said they had denied the abuse when asked because they feared they would be in trouble if they disclosed. A male survivor described his experience with police after details of the abuse in out-of-home care during the 1980s came to light:

I clearly remember the big police sergeant drilling me for questions with his big booming voice, you know ... I was about 12 years old sitting in the chair in the opposite room, probably thinking 'What's all this?' You know, 'What have I done?' I don't know what I thought, but I would have denied it. Of course I would have denied it.<sup>96</sup>

Survivors' sense of responsibility for the sexual abuse was often closely tied to their feelings of shame and embarrassment and the feeling they had not done enough to stop or prevent the abuse. Many of these survivors said they felt somehow complicit in the abuse, especially when they had been aroused during the abuse and/or had a close bond with the perpetrator as a result of extensive grooming. One male survivor told the Commissioner he was abused by a teacher at a school during the 1990s:

Why didn't I tell anyone? You start realising that it's a bit embarrassing and so you wouldn't want people to know, so you are ashamed about it. Because at first you didn't repel it, you didn't stop it, so then the fact that you're accepting it and then when you realise it's probably weird and not normal, and then you're embarrassed and ashamed to tell anybody about it.<sup>97</sup>

## Barriers during childhood

Many survivors who had been sexually abused within a religious institution said it was socially unacceptable to speak out against a religious institution. These survivors explained that the high status of the institution meant their disclosures would not have been believed, or they would have been punished for creating trouble or telling lies. This was especially the case for those whose families were devoutly religious. These survivors said their expectations were they would have been 'belted' or disowned had they attempted to disclose the abuse at the time.<sup>98</sup>

Survivors also said perpetrators and others associated with the institution threatened them to prevent disclosure or further disclosures. For victims of child sexual abuse in religious institutions, these threats sometimes had a spiritual dimension. One male survivor, who said he was abused at a religious boarding school during the 1950s, told the Commissioner:

He said to me 'If you tell anybody about this, God will strike you dead and you will go straight to hell' ... How can anyone say that to a child, a child whose family is a Catholic Church attending, God-fearing family?<sup>99</sup>

Another survivor told the Commissioner that nuns at the church where she had been abused told her 'little girls who tell lies go to hell'.<sup>100</sup> In both cases, it was a long time before the survivors felt able to speak of the abuse again.

Some survivors told Commissioners confusion about sexual abuse prevented them from disclosing. Their experiences show this was especially the case when the child was sexually abused by another child. Often, it was only much later that survivors found out what they had experienced was a crime.

Confusion was also common when the perpetrator had established a 'trusting' relationship with the victim and their family during the grooming process leading up to the abuse. In many of these instances, the survivor reflected that even if they did know what was happening was wrong, they would not have had anyone to tell.

## Barriers during adulthood

Some adult survivors who delayed disclosure of child sexual abuse until later in adulthood, including those who provided their first full account at a private session, told Commissioners they had not disclosed until then because they had not been ready to cope with the impacts of disclosure. In some cases, these survivors had been directly asked whether they had experienced child sexual abuse and had denied it. One female survivor told the Commissioner:

When I was probably 19 or 20 my father came and visited me at my house ... He actually asked me, '[Perpetrator] never abused you or your sisters, did he?' And so I actually said, 'No'. I basically told my father what he wanted to hear. Why? Because it was 7.30 in the morning and I just did not want to get into it.<sup>101</sup>

Other survivors felt they did not want to re-live memories of the abuse. They spoke of having previously disclosed and not wishing to open themselves up again. They wanted, for the time being, to try to avoid or to bury the issue and get on with their lives. A male survivor described the ongoing pain associated with disclosure and dealing with the impacts of the abuse:

It's hard, you don't want to go back and go back over it all again. It all settles down and then another five years and off you go again. You just get tired. It does, it makes you mentally tired.<sup>102</sup>

## 3.6 Wellbeing

---

This section describes how survivors in private sessions perceived their wellbeing immediately after, and in the years following, their experience of child sexual abuse. For most survivors, the sexual abuse itself was only one factor influencing their wellbeing throughout their life. Their circumstances as children and as adults, including educational achievement, stability of employment and supportive relationships were important factors and contributed to their sense of wellbeing at the time of the private session. While each survivor's description of their life in the years after the abuse was different, there were some common patterns.

Some survivors described lives which had been largely dominated by their experience of child sexual abuse. These survivors' lives were characterised by persistent and pervasive difficulties throughout childhood and adulthood, such as abuse and neglect within the family environment, limited work and career opportunities and chronic mental health conditions including substance abuse. Many of these survivors felt they were powerless to change the course of their lives.

Other survivors experienced a mixed life journey. They told Commissioners they functioned well in some aspects of life while simultaneously not functioning well in others. Some described having a successful career or a fulfilling relationship with their partner, while at the same time experiencing mental health issues including substance abuse. Many had a sense of purpose or responsibility to their families or jobs, but found it difficult to balance this with ongoing issues with interpersonal relationships and mental health.

Some survivors had experienced substantial adverse events either immediately following the abuse or following a trigger event later in life, but were optimistic their life would improve. Many of these survivors had considered or attempted suicide. Many felt they had supportive family or friends. Survivors who told Commissioners they lacked these supports described having other protective factors in their lives, such as education, a fulfilling career and in some cases well-loved animals. These protective factors helped provide a sense of purpose or direction and the belief life would improve.

A smaller number of survivors told Commissioners their life journey had oscillated between periods of wellbeing and periods of distress. These survivors were less likely to describe ongoing issues of distrust, anger or violence and the majority spoke of having long-term supportive relationships.

Another small group of survivors described being on a life journey they perceived to be mostly positive. They tended to acknowledge the sexual abuse and its effects and many had attended and found benefit from counselling. Some had re-interpreted what had occurred during childhood in some positive light.

The following sections present information under thematic headings, though this was not how survivors experienced impacts on their wellbeing. Instead, impacts on wellbeing were experienced more holistically – often as a cascade of interrelated events. For example: mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and substance use affected access to employment; financial and housing insecurity made finding and maintaining relationships difficult; and a lack of supportive intimate relationships made some survivors angry or depressed.

### 3.6.1 Mental health and behaviour

Most survivors (93.3 per cent) discussed their past and current wellbeing with the Commissioner. Among these survivors, most (94.9 per cent) told Commissioners they experienced poor mental health at one or more points during their lives as a consequence of their experience of child sexual abuse. Most commonly, survivors talked about trying to manage their feelings of depression and anxiety. Some felt completely debilitated by these conditions most of the time and said they were unable to work or maintain close personal relationships.

Many survivors volunteered that they had attempted suicide, or had thoughts about attempting suicide, at least once in their life. Of those who spoke about wellbeing, 16.4 per cent reported having attempted suicide and 19.8 per cent spoke about having thoughts of suicide. Many said they had also engaged in other self-harming behaviours. Many talked about the suicide of others, which they believed was a consequence of child sexual abuse. Thirty victims who had died by suicide had family members who attended a private session. Survivors who had thought of and attempted suicide spoke of feeling completely overwhelmed at the time. These survivors explained they often felt unable to cope and suicide was the only way to ease the burden of their pain.

Survivors told Commissioners suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts commonly occurred in the years immediately following the abuse or following a trigger event. 'Leah' told the Commissioner she was three years old when she was first abused by her foster father.<sup>103</sup> She said, 'Eva', her foster mother, finally admitted she knew what was going on when 'Leah' was in her teens. 'Eva' also confessed 'her own father did the same thing to her ... She had a son by her own father'. 'Leah' told the Commissioner she had been suicidal: 'I tried to hurt myself, to kill myself. I've hung myself three times'.<sup>104</sup>

'Walter Lewis' told the Commissioner he came close to suicide several times after being sexually abused many times from the age of 12, including in a Methodist boys' home where he tried to slit his wrists with broken glass.<sup>105</sup> By the age of 17, he said he 'was just so distressed about everything. Everywhere I went I was suffering some sort of abuse'. The suicidal thoughts continued into adulthood, but he told the Commissioner what finally saved him was his love for his animals:

I had the shotgun and I actually put the shotgun in me mouth and I was going to, I was really going to. I couldn't stand it anymore. But I put me dogs in the yard and I just couldn't. I couldn't do it because of me dogs.<sup>106</sup>

Survivors, more commonly males than females, often spoke of experiencing periods of intense anger and aggression. At times, this resulted in them acting aggressively towards others. Some described anger as a self-protection strategy, especially in the years immediately following the sexual abuse and into early adulthood. One survivor described the abuse he experienced at a school during the 1990s. He told the Commissioner:

When I left school, I decided I wasn't going to be abused by anyone, not my dad, not the perpetrator, not even anyone on the street. If anyone would say anything to me, I became aggressive and violent. I'd go to parties and people would say something and I'd bash the shit out of them, like just out of control, just bash them.<sup>107</sup>

Some survivors spoke of the impact their ongoing anger had on the people around them. While some acknowledged they used anger as a self-protective survival strategy, they felt sorry for the impact it had on their relationships. Family members told Commissioners how they learned to live with their loved one's anger. The wife of a survivor abused in a school during the 1970s said:

There was so many times that my husband was so angry with the world. Angry with everything, angry with them, everything. I just said to the kids that 'Something happened to daddy when he was young', just to put it in that context.<sup>108</sup>

Many survivors told Commissioners they had turned to alcohol or drugs as a means of trying to cope with or escape the pain associated with the ongoing trauma. Many recognised substance use had only helped them in the short term and that it was ultimately a destructive strategy. One survivor saw a direct link between his experience of sexual and emotional abuse in foster care and his later life outcomes:

A definite connection exists between my childhood experience and tragic outcomes later in life. I regard my chronic alcoholism as symptomatic of deeper unresolved issues, and such issues remain with me to this day. I came to rely on alcohol as a fuel that enabled me to overcome these feelings and face the world. Predictably my life's journey spiralled out of control resulting in inappropriate and misguided behaviour in my own life.<sup>109</sup>

Drugs and alcohol were a common, but not the only, means of avoidance.<sup>110</sup> Most survivors who used drugs and alcohol for avoidance, however, described a point in time where they felt this strategy had stopped working. One female survivor, abused in a church during the 1970s, said:

I threw myself into work. That's exactly what I did, and drank a lot. Drank a lot. Took the odd batch of antidepressants and kept forging. But last year, I left my job in October. I didn't have to. But I just thought, you know, I've got to focus on this stuff.<sup>111</sup>

Some survivors said they experienced nightmares on a regular basis. Others told Commissioners they experienced flashbacks and sleep disturbance, especially in the days leading up to their private session. This appeared to be more common among survivors who had, until recently, sought to repress or ignore memories of the abuse as a means of functioning with day-to-day life. Some survivors said media reports about the Royal Commission's work, or preparing for their private session, had forced them to confront the abuse, while their usual strategy may have been to avoid thinking about it. One male survivor, abused in a day school during the 1960s, told the Commissioner:

I agree with you, that it has resurfaced more forcefully. Potentially the Royal Commission has had something to do with that, and I don't begrudge the Royal Commission for that because I think it is important. I am so glad this Royal Commission exists.<sup>112</sup>

### 3.6.2 Interpersonal relationships

Two-thirds of survivors (67.6 per cent) who spoke about wellbeing told Commissioners they experienced difficulties with interpersonal relationships. Survivors often attributed these difficulties to the impact of their experience of child sexual abuse in an institution. Many said they found it hard to build and maintain trust, which affected their ability to enter into and remain committed in relationships. Many explained that this led to feelings of loneliness and isolation, which were often exacerbated by anxieties around social interactions. Survivors often said they coped with this anxiety by withdrawing from others and becoming reclusive, 'preferring their own company'.<sup>113</sup> Many expressed regret they had not had the opportunity for more fulfilling social relationships, but felt they needed to protect their wellbeing by isolating themselves from people who might hurt or reject them. One female survivor reflected on the consequences of the abuse:

You just get on with it in a way you can cope with life. I'm just better not in big crowds and I'm not ... I repeat things, 'Why didn't I fit into that group?' you know. I think I'm a kind and good person but just never fit into social groups like other people do. I guess I'm only at the beginning now of realising what problems it's caused.<sup>114</sup>

One-quarter of survivors (24.2 per cent) who spoke about wellbeing told Commissioners about their difficulties with physical intimacy and affection, and some said they preferred to avoid sex altogether. Most attributed their difficulties to their experiences of being sexually abused as a child. Other survivors felt uncomfortable with physical touch. They regretted the consequences this had on their capacity to form and maintain intimate relationships and, in some cases, have children of their own. One female survivor told the Commissioner:

I haven't been able to live a life. I'm [in my fifties]. I don't trust anyone enough. I've had boyfriends, but I've never been sexually involved with any of them. And I just can't even cope with that. So I have no children.<sup>115</sup>

While most survivors suggested their experience of child sexual abuse had negatively affected relationships at some point in their lives, many told Commissioners how important a supportive partner had been in maintaining their wellbeing. Survivors described partners who had helped them to face the abuse and move on with their lives. Others spoke of the importance of having a trusting and optimistic person who could help them keep things in perspective.<sup>116</sup> Some described relationships with former romantic partners who continued to have a positive influence on their lives, despite the decision to live separately. One survivor attended with his former wife, who described their relationship as loving and supportive even though they were no longer able to have an intimate relationship. She explained:

It's not a normal break-up. We still love one another. He is still my family and I think to him I'm still his, because he comes to me, like today. It's this terrible situation of where I think he has had pretty much a mental breakdown, emotional breakdown, where he just couldn't cope with the challenges of intimate life any more with me.<sup>117</sup>

Other survivors believed access to supportive family relationships had been fundamental to their wellbeing and ability to remain resilient despite the abuse. One survivor told the Commissioner that he survived ‘because my parents were there beside me to help carry me through’.<sup>118</sup> A couple of survivors said they had suffered relatively few adverse consequences after being sexually abused as a child due to the positive support mechanisms that surrounded them in the years following.<sup>119</sup> However, this experience was atypical. In particular, survivors who were not living with their family at the time they were sexually abused rarely told Commissioners their family had been a source of support or resilience.

### 3.6.3 Physical health

Many survivors described living with poor physical health, which they sometimes attributed to having experienced physical abuse or neglect as a child while living in an institution. Some told Commissioners they sustained hearing loss from having been beaten about the head, or immune-related conditions from living with chronic stress. Some described the ongoing physical health conditions they endured as a consequence of being subjected to extremely violent sexual abuse as a child.

A number of older men told Commissioners about rectal tearing and how, to this day, they still suffer daily bleeding when going to the toilet rather than seek medical treatment. After all the years since the sexual abuse, they continue to feel embarrassment and shame about what happened – to such an extent it still prevents them from seeking help.

Some female survivors also indicated they avoided doctors as adults due to their childhood experiences of being ‘medically examined’ by perpetrators in hospitals, surgeries, youth detention centres and even in their own homes.

Other survivors described how the strategies they had used to cope with the trauma of being sexually abused as a child had affected their physical health. Some suggested they had become ‘reckless’ in the years following the abuse, practising unsafe sex and contracting sexually transmitted infections.<sup>120</sup> Some female survivors told Commissioners they became overweight in a deliberate attempt to look unattractive to men. One male survivor said he was abused in an historical residential institution during the 1950s. He said he believed his prostate problems were due to an ongoing fear of using public toilets:

Currently I still feel the trauma relating to this treatment. For example, if I go into public toilets I don’t like [to] use public urinals because of memories of humiliation and degradation, and the smell of urine acts as a trigger. This is an ongoing experience for me and I will wait until I go home to use the toilet. Holding onto the urine has caused me further health problems and I have had to have transurethral reconstruction of the prostate. My surgeon has torn strips off me over my holding in of the urine.<sup>121</sup>



### 3.6.4 Spirituality

Experiencing child sexual abuse in institutional contexts affected survivors' spirituality in diverse ways. Some said they had sought solace in spirituality and religion, suggesting their faith had helped them process and gain perspective on what had occurred. Others felt they had maintained their faith, but found it difficult to actively engage with religious institutions.

The majority of survivors, especially those abused in a religious setting, had a different experience. Of this group, some felt anger towards the religious institution and had rejected religion entirely. Some felt anger and disillusionment due to the response they had received from the institution following disclosure of the child sexual abuse, which was sometimes exacerbated by being ostracised from the religious community. Volume 16, *Religious institutions* describes in more detail the impact of child sexual abuse on spirituality for survivors who were abused in a religious institution.

### 3.6.5 Education, employment and economic security

Over half of survivors (55.7 per cent) who spoke about wellbeing in private sessions told Commissioners they experienced poor educational outcomes or economic insecurity. Many described having difficulty concentrating and achieving poor grades in the years immediately after being sexually abused. This was especially common among victims who were abused in a school setting. They spoke of becoming disruptive in class and many left school earlier than they thought they would had they not been sexually abused.

Many survivors told Commissioners that their poor results at school had limited their lifelong learning and career opportunities. For others, a trigger event related to the abuse prevented them from achieving later in life or interrupted their career progression. Many survivors spoke of the disappointment they felt at not having reached their potential in either tertiary education or career development. Reflecting on the consequences of her experience of abuse in foster care during the 1980s, one female survivor told the Commissioner:

I just want to point out that the impact stays with you for life and into adulthood and it can be an obstacle to being a productive member of society. I ache for that little girl who could have had, or should have had, those opportunities, I really do.<sup>122</sup>

Several survivors spoke of being unable to settle into a job or career path, often due to ongoing mental health issues. They felt they could not get traction in a career when they had to take periods of time off to deal with depression, anxiety or substance abuse issues. Others said they had difficulty taking direction from people in authority. This was more common among survivors who had been abused by a person in authority.

Some survivors said they had managed to pursue further education, though this often occurred later in life as a mature-aged student rather than immediately following school. Some noted they had been motivated to pursue further education so they could work with vulnerable populations, such as working with migrants and refugees, people with disability or children in out-of-home care.

Other survivors told Commissioners they experienced periods of financial hardship, often because mental health issues had prevented them from being able to find or maintain secure employment. Under-employment and unemployment sometimes led to episodes of homelessness and housing instability. While some survivors had received redress payments from the institution where they were abused, many of this group felt the payments were inadequate compensation for the ongoing financial and emotional hardship they experienced. One survivor said he was abused in an historical residential institution during the 1960s. He told the Commissioner:

I've got nothing to lose. As long as I don't have to give the \$30,000 back, because I haven't got it. I'm a man in my mid-60s, I don't have a family, I don't have a home, I live in a caravan. As a direct result of all of this, I've lost everything, you know.<sup>123</sup>

Some survivors indicated to Commissioners they turned to crime in an attempt to solve their financial problems. This was especially common among survivors who said they spent their childhood in large historical residential institutions and received limited education. These survivors told Commissioners they had no means of supporting themselves once they left the institution due to their poor education. While some said they had turned to crime as a means of supporting themselves, others did so to support substance abuse problems. Some were convicted of violent offences as they struggled to cope with ongoing anger and aggression.

### 3.6.6 Ripple effects

Some family and friends of victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse attended a private session. They described to the best of their understanding the experiences of loved ones who could not or did not attend themselves. They often spoke of the 'ripple effect' the abuse had had on their own lives.

Some parents, especially those from tight-knit religious communities, described how they had been ostracised following the details of the child sexual abuse being made public. Parents spoke of the high price they had paid for supporting their children. One father told the Commissioner about his community response to the child sexual abuse allegations:

It was very upsetting. We were ostracised. We'd had a very active role in our church community, being small. I was a minister of communion, cleaned the church, read, visited the sick, all of that. The perpetrator told everyone he could that a drunken kid of the [surname of family] was saying these terrible things. They did a fair job of character assassinating our son and us. I mean, I was just left off the roster at the church. I just didn't appear anymore.<sup>124</sup>

Parents and family members of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions also described the economic hardship they experienced as a result of supporting their children. They spoke of taking time off work to emotionally support their child or take action on their behalf. Some lost their jobs or chose to leave their jobs to provide full-time support. One parent attended a private session to describe her child's recent experience of abuse at a school and the effect the abuse had on the family. She told the Commissioner:

I've had time off work. I've had quite a lot of time off work. Financially, our family has lost quite a bit of money. I ended up losing my job because I was so involved with this. I was totally focused on this, and work was just ... I don't know. It just wasn't important.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.6.7 Sources of strength and survival

Some survivors described sources of strength and survival that had helped them lead positive, full lives despite experiencing sexual abuse as a child. Many relied upon support from family and friends, though this was not a prerequisite for survivors to perceive they were happy with life. Others learned strategies for managing relationships and mental health issues through counselling. Some pursued the perpetrator or institution through legal action or via redress programs, though seeking justice sometimes took a heavy toll. At the time of the private session, a small group of survivors said their experiences of sexual abuse and trauma had led to positive changes in their lives.

#### Family and friends

Survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions who attended private sessions repeatedly said one of their main sources of emotional and practical support were family and friends. Many survivors felt the presence of at least one supportive family member or friend was a source of comfort and security, even when the support person was not aware of the abuse. A number of survivors told Commissioners they relied on the love and support of animal friends – including cats, dogs and even 'chooks'<sup>126</sup> – to get them through the day and give meaning to their lives.

A small number of survivors attributed their ongoing wellbeing to the strong support they received from their family. One survivor who said she was abused in a church during the 1960s told the Commissioner:

I don't think any of us [in our family] have been adversely affected in the long term. You grow up in a big family and you've got good support mechanisms around you and you see it mostly as an aberration.<sup>127</sup>

However, most survivors perceived their wellbeing was affected by the abuse. Even those with supportive family and friends, and especially those without, had periods of distress. Survivors who grew up in, or were removed from, abusive or neglectful families commonly said they struggled to find and maintain close, supportive relationships to help them through life.

## Counselling

Many survivors told Commissioners in private sessions that they had attended counselling. Most said the counselling was helpful – once they found a counsellor they felt comfortable with. This often took several attempts. Some survivors told Commissioners they found it difficult to find counsellors they could trust or who understood the trauma associated with child sexual abuse.

Some survivors told Commissioners the counselling they received had been too passive and had little if any therapeutic benefit. These survivors complained their counsellor had listened to them but had not offered suggestions or advice on how they might feel better over time. A small number of survivors described counsellors who they perceived to be dismissive or disbelieving of the abuse. This was especially damaging, often resulting in survivors feeling unable to speak of their experience of child sexual abuse. One female survivor described her counsellor's reaction after she disclosed the details of the sexual abuse:

I said to her 'Is there anything we should do about this?' She said 'Well, not really. Do you want to talk about it more?' I said 'Well, I suppose there's been worse abuse' and she said 'Yes, I've heard worse'. That was a pity because had she explored it with me, maybe some of the subsequent things wouldn't have occurred, which really derailed my life badly.<sup>128</sup>

Survivors who had accessed helpful counselling sometimes said they were able to make the traumatic memories part of their past instead of a constant intrusion into the present. Mostly however, they said counsellors had taught them strategies to deal with the ongoing consequences of abuse, such as mindfulness and meditation. Others learned how to manage relationships in light of their ongoing problems with anger management.

Many survivors expressed the view they could have benefited from counselling, or more counselling, but experienced barriers to accessing the right services. Some, especially those who already struggled to make ends meet, found counselling too expensive. Several survivors noted the 10 counselling sessions covered through the Medicare rebate scheme were not sufficient to make therapeutic progress, and said they could not afford to independently fund ongoing therapy. Others did not want to risk unpacking the trauma without the security of knowing there was ongoing support.

## Pursuit of justice

Some survivors spoke of channelling their energy into ensuring the person who sexually abused them or the institution in which the abuse occurred was held accountable for the damage they caused. Most, including those who were successful in obtaining a conviction or compensation from the institution, said they had found pursuing justice took a toll on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Many survivors' expectations were not met: institutions often did not acknowledge or accept responsibility for the sexual abuse, and perpetrators were not held accountable for their actions. In some cases, survivors acknowledged the pursuit of justice was a way of avoiding the trauma associated with the abuse, and wondered whether 'achieving' justice was possible. Describing what keeps her going, one survivor who said she was abused at a school during the 1980s told the Commissioner:

I don't want to let the bastards win, it's as simple as that ... the only reason I get out of bed in the mornings is the hope that one day someone will listen and act upon what I've said. I made a conscious decision back when I was a teenager that if anyone was ever going to listen to me, I couldn't end up a drug addict, unemployed, living in Housing Commission on the outskirts of the city, because no one would take me seriously. That's the only reason I've kept it together for as long as I have. What happens after that, I don't know. Maybe a great weight will be lifted off my shoulders and I might enjoy my life or I might just go downhill, I really don't know.<sup>129</sup>

## Post-traumatic growth

Survivors who attended private sessions sometimes described how they had been able to develop better understanding and find personal growth despite their experiences of child sexual abuse. Often this occurred with the help of counselling support. Some felt that understanding their experiences of child sexual abuse through counselling had made them better parents because they were committed to ensuring their own children were equipped with knowledge and skills to help prevent child sexual abuse. Others said they felt better equipped to empathise with others as a result of having experienced adversity.

For many survivors, the determination to survive and grow was a major motivating factor and helped them to turn their lives around. 'Ken James' told the Commissioner he spent a lot of his adult years angry.<sup>130</sup> He took drugs and drank heavily. He could not be affectionate and his marriage broke up. For a long time, he was not in contact with his children. In his late thirties, 'Ken James' said he finally realised he needed to change. He went to group therapy, did a lot of talking and saw 'a lot of shrinks along the way'. Apart from anything else, he was determined to 'show you bastards [the perpetrators] anyway that I can be a success in life'.<sup>131</sup>

Many survivors said they believed they had finally arrived at a place of acceptance and were able to move forward while acknowledging their past trauma. One survivor told the Commissioner he was abused in a school during the 1990s. He described his strategy to get past his experience of abuse:

I made a conscious decision to say, 'You know what, I'm not going to blame anything or anyone. I'm going to pick myself up and I'm going to be successful and happy and be a good person, it doesn't matter what's happened in the past'.<sup>132</sup>

Attempting to make meaning of the past was often difficult for survivors. Many survivors explained to Commissioners that while this strategy may have helped, trigger events experienced at any time caused unexpected emotional distress.

## 4 Children and young people

### 4.1 Overview

---

Chapter 4 examines the experiences of survivors who were sexually abused in institutions in recent times. This analysis of contemporary institutional child sexual abuse is based on the experiences of children (aged under 18) and young people (aged 18 to 24) who attended a private session, or whose family member attended. We conducted:

- qualitative analysis of a sample of 50 narratives written from the accounts given during private sessions by children and young people or their family members
- quantitative analysis of the accounts given during private sessions of 285 children and young people or their family members.

Over half of the children and young people (61.4 per cent) did not attend the private session themselves. We instead heard of their experiences from one or more of their parents or another relative. For ease of reference and to assist readability, we have used the term ‘children and young people’ in this chapter to refer to anyone who participated in a private session and talked to a Commissioner about the child sexual abuse of a victim who was aged under 25 at the time of their private session.

### 4.2 Profile of children and young people

---

Of the 6,875 survivors and/or their family and friends who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017 to share their experiences of child sexual abuse in Australian institutions, 285 (4.1 per cent) were children and young people.

Of the 285 children and young people in private sessions:

- almost the same number were male (50.2 per cent) as female (49.8 per cent)
- 15.4 per cent were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors
- 15.8 per cent said they were a child with disability at the time of the abuse
- almost half (49.8 per cent) were under 18 at the time of their private session.

Further information about the children and young people who participated in private sessions is provided at Appendix O.

## 4.3 Experiences of abuse

---

During private sessions, survivors chose what they wanted to share with Commissioners. The majority of children and young people did talk about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced. They told Commissioners what happened to them, the institutions where it happened and who sexually abused them.

Some children and young people did not go into detail about all aspects of their experience of sexual abuse. They said it was too painful and they wanted to forget, or they felt shame or embarrassment. In some cases, they did not want to tell the Commissioners what happened to them because the first time they tried to tell someone they were not believed. 'Imogen' told the Commissioner she was 10 when she was a witness in the trial of the perpetrator who abused her.<sup>133</sup> She said the trial judge did not believe her and dismissed the case. 'Imogen' was reluctant to talk about the abuse. As she explained: 'I don't really want to say the things he did to me again, and you know why, because when I did tell, no one believed me'.<sup>134</sup>

This section reports quantitative information taking into account the varying numbers of children and young people who provided information about the different types of abuse they experienced.<sup>135</sup>

### 4.3.1 Nature of the abuse

Three-quarters of children and young people (76.1 per cent) told Commissioners in private sessions their age when they were first sexually abused. More than one in 10 of these children and young people (12.9 per cent) were under the age of five, and 47.5 per cent said they were aged under 10. The average age when these children and young people first experienced sexual abuse was 9.7 years. Females tended to be abused at a younger age than males: on average, female children and young people were aged 9.0 years when the abuse started compared to 10.4 years for males.

The majority of children and young people (76.5 per cent) reported the frequency of abuse. Of this group, 78.0 per cent said they experienced multiple episodes of sexual abuse. Among children and young people who discussed the duration of the abuse (64.6 per cent of survivors), 78.3 per cent said the abuse lasted one year or less. A small but substantial proportion of children and young people (5.4 per cent) were abused over six or more years.



Of the 285 children and young people in private sessions, three quarters (76.5 per cent) told the Commissioners about the types of sexual abuse they experienced. Of these (noting that many experienced multiple episodes and types of sexual abuse):

- over half (56.9 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact abuse, such as sexual touching of their body or being made to touch the perpetrator's body
- almost half (47.7 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving penetration (for example, penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, another body part or an object)
- one in five (20.6 per cent) described experiences consistent with being groomed for sexual contact (for example, behaviours that manipulate and control the child, their families and other support networks, or institutions, with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence, and avoiding discovery of the sexual abuse)
- 17.9 per cent described experiences consistent with being exposed to sexual acts and material (for example, having sexual acts performed in front of them, having genitals exposed to them, or being shown pornographic material)
- 17.9 per cent described experiences where their privacy was violated, such as being forced to undress in front of someone or being watched while showering
- 5.5 per cent described experiences consistent with child sexual exploitation (that is, being coerced or manipulated into participating in sexual activity in return for something such as food, accommodation, clothing, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money, or an incentive such as love, affection or safety).

## Grooming

About one in five children and young people told Commissioners that they were groomed by adult perpetrators in positions of authority and trust, such as foster carers and teachers. Survivors told Commissioners these perpetrators often portrayed themselves as respectable and caring. They demonstrated concern for the child when in public and in the company of the child's family.

Survivors said perpetrators cultivated relationships with parents to gain trust. Many survivors told Commissioners their parents had welcomed and accepted the perpetrator into the family home. 'Chanel', an elite athlete from a young age, told the Commissioner her sports coach had offered her an opportunity to undertake additional training with him after school.<sup>136</sup> Her family was happy about the additional coaching and allowed her to spend many hours with her coach unsupervised. 'Chanel' described how the coach was initially affectionate but became physically and sexually abusive. She said she withdrew from sporting competition after he raped her when she was 17.

## Emotional and physical abuse

Some children and young people (38.9 per cent) talked to Commissioners about other forms of abuse they experienced in the lead up to, during and/or after the child sexual abuse. Over three quarters of these survivors (77.5 per cent) described being emotionally abused, which included being intimidated, bullied, humiliated and locked up in solitary confinement. Just over half (52.3 per cent) said they experienced physical abuse, such as being punched, kicked and slapped. A small number of children and young people said they were neglected, or witnessed the abuse of others.

Most children and young people who attended a private session described adult perpetrators as acting alone when carrying out acts of physical and psychological violence. Survivors who were children in family-based out-of-home care told Commissioners male adults were often the perpetrators of the abuse. Survivors said these perpetrators did little to hide their abusive behaviours from other adults in the home. Some survivors also said wives or female partners were complicit in the abuse. One victim, 'Brianna', said she was sexually, physically and psychologically abused by her foster father.<sup>137</sup> 'Brianna's' story, as told in her private session, is profiled in Section 4.4.4.

Children and young people also described experiences of physical and psychological violence at school. More often, this abuse came from children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours, sometimes with the help of other children. Survivors described to Commissioners how they were teased and threatened by other children. 'Logan Reece' was a Year 9 student at a religious boarding school when he was abused.<sup>138</sup> He told the Commissioner he was often tied up and left outside for long periods. He was 'kicked in the testicles and stomped on multiple times'. 'Logan Reece' described the physical abuse and torment as relentless. He said he thought it happened to everyone: 'At the time when I was at school, I guess because it was a part of the school's culture, it just seemed normal'.<sup>139</sup>

### 4.3.2 The institutions

Children and young people in private sessions indicated they were sexually abused in a range of institutional settings, including boarding and day schools, out-of-home care, youth detention, respite and residential care, childcare and after-school care. The majority (90.2 per cent) told Commissioners they were abused in one institution.

Of the 285 children and young people in private sessions (noting that some were sexually abused in multiple institutions):

- over one-third (35.4 per cent) said they were sexually abused in contemporary out-of-home care (that is, foster care, kinship/relative care and residential care)
- over one quarter (27.4 per cent) said they were sexually abused in a day or boarding school

- fewer than one in 10 (7.7 per cent) said they were sexually abused while they participated in, or were involved in, religious activities, such as attending a church, temple or synagogue. A similar proportion (7.4 per cent) said they were abused in a youth detention institution
- 36.5 per cent said they were sexually abused in government-managed organisations
- 24.9 per cent said they were sexually abused in an institution managed by a religious organisation.

Religious-managed institutions include a wide range of institutions in addition to places of worship, such as day and boarding schools, respite care and group homes. Of the 71 children and young people abused in religious-managed institutions, 32.4 per cent said they were abused in a Catholic-managed institution. A total of 21.1 per cent said that they were abused in an institution affiliated with the Anglican Church, and 8.5 per cent in an institution managed by The Salvation Army.

#### 4.3.3 Adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours

Children and young people told Commissioners about the sexual abuse they experienced at the hands of adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours. The majority (79.3 per cent) said they were abused by a single person.

Most adult perpetrators held some form of authority over the victim within the institution where the sexual abuse occurred. Some held multiple roles within an institution (for example, teacher and priest). In general, the Royal Commission recorded only the ‘primary’ role (for example, teacher rather than priest if the victim was abused in a school).

Of the 285 children and young people in private sessions (noting that some were sexually abused by more than one person):

- the majority (86.7 per cent) said they were sexually abused by males
- just over one-quarter of children and young people who provided information about the role of the perpetrator (27.3 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a foster carer
- about one in 10 of those who discussed the role of the perpetrator (9.8 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a teacher
- of those who provided information about the role of the perpetrator, 5.3 per cent said they were sexually abused by custodial staff, commonly staff within youth detention facilities.

Over three quarters of children and young people (76.8 per cent) told the Commissioner they knew the approximate age of the person or persons who sexually abused them. Of this group, 61.6 per cent said they were sexually abused by an adult aged 18 years or older and 42.9 per cent indicated they were sexually abused by a child, such as a foster sibling or child at their school or residential care facility.

#### 4.3.4 How children tried to avoid the abuse

Based on what they told Commissioners, children and young people often attempted to protect themselves from the sexual abuse. They told Commissioners about their attempts to control abusive situations even though they had little or no power and were often isolated from protective adults.

Survivors told Commissioners they had run away – sometimes repeatedly – from boarding school and residential care. Others said they had tried to put distance or barriers between themselves and the person abusing them, such as by not playing near a child exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours, or by wearing clothes that made it difficult for the abuse to take place. Some ‘went along’ with the sexual abuse, which they believe may have protected them, and possibly others, from further harm. Several survivors described fighting back, getting into trouble at school and drawing attention to their distress by refusing to go to school.

Commissioners were told that following the sexual abuse, young children and children with disability commonly ‘acted out’ through behaviours such as refusing to go to school and tantrums. Some said they started wetting the bed. Children who had otherwise been enthusiastic and involved at school refused to go to school or to get onto the school bus the adult perpetrator was driving. Other children described hiding from perpetrators or children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours and some described fighting back.

Most often, survivors told Commissioners that adults who could have protected them misinterpreted children’s self-protection strategies. Parents who attended private sessions said they understood the reasons behind their child’s sudden change in behaviour only in hindsight. Some expressed regret they had overlooked their child’s distress and attempts at communication. Others, mistakenly, had thought the behaviours were connected to other developmental changes, such as becoming a teenager.

## 4.4 Circumstances at the time of abuse

---

Analysis of private sessions with children and young people revealed common themes in their descriptions of the circumstances of the abuse. These were often not directly related to the child. Aspects of society and culture, the institution and family were the broader contexts to victims' experiences of abuse.

### 4.4.1 Social and cultural context

Children and young people described a social and cultural environment within institutions where children were not believed or listened to when they reported sexual abuse. They told Commissioners that parents' views and actions were also devalued, especially parents of children in out-of-home care.

Many children and young people believed the general community and institutional leaders had a limited understanding of child sexual abuse and its impact on victims and their parents. Survivors told Commissioners they felt people in authority did not understand what it meant to provide for children's safety or how to respond to disclosures of sexual abuse. 'Olwyn' attended a private session to describe her son's experience of sexual abuse by another child at his primary school.<sup>140</sup> She told the Commissioner the school principal had told her not to 'make a big deal out of it'. 'Olwyn' said she tried to argue that kissing and licking of private parts were 'a whole different level' for six and seven year olds, but the principal minimised the behaviour as 'experimentation'.

Some children and young people described a general culture that tended to stereotype boys' behaviour. They told Commissioners some institutional authorities held outdated assumptions about gender and masculinity. Such assumptions were common in institutions where parental concerns about bullying and children being sexually abused by other children had been minimised. Survivors described how bullying and sexual harassment were often passed off as 'boys being boys'. 'Alfreda' described the bullying her son, 'Lachlan', had experienced in the school yard.<sup>141</sup> 'Alfreda' said she approached the school principal to raise her concerns and was told 'Lachlan' should learn to 'stand up for himself' and 'face the problems'. She said the bullying later escalated into sexual abuse.<sup>142</sup>

Many parents of children in out-of-home care perceived society stereotyped them as not loving or caring about their children. Some parents suggested these stereotypes had led to their concerns about carers' behaviour not being taken seriously. In most cases, these parents understood why their children had initially been removed from their care. They told Commissioners government officials and providers had not held the carers who had abused their children to account. Many parents believed the institutions responsible for caring for their children had not properly regulated or monitored the carers responsible for their day-to-day safety and welfare.

#### 4.4.2 Institutional context

Many children and young people talked to Commissioners about how institutions may have contributed to their vulnerability to child sexual abuse. They said institutional authorities prioritised status and reputation within the community ahead of children's safety and protection. Survivors told us about many institutions that inadequately supervised and monitored staff who worked with children and inadequately supervised children with a history of violence and/or harmful sexual behaviours. In most cases institutional responses to bullying and the disclosure of child sexual abuse were ineffective and inappropriate.

Many children and young people described institutions where bullying was tolerated. In some cases, bullying escalated to sexual abuse. Survivors perceived institutional authorities either ignored bullying or inadequately supervised children when they were alone. Many survivors noted other children witnessed the bullying, and sometimes the sexual abuse, but did nothing out of fear that they too would become victims. Some told Commissioners the culture of bullying and aggression, especially between boys, had the effect of normalising sexual abuse of a child by another child with harmful sexual behaviour. 'Logan Reece' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused at the Catholic boarding school he attended on a scholarship for academic achievement.<sup>143</sup> He told the Commissioner older boys would patrol the corridors before the boarders went to sleep. The older boys witnessed 'Logan Reece's' sexual abuse, but did not do anything about it.<sup>144</sup>

Survivors described institutional responses to bullying as paying 'lip service' to children's safety and doing very little to protect children. Some children and young people, who were abused in a school setting, said the school's principal and staff cared more about protecting the image and reputation of the school than abiding by its child protection and anti-bullying policies. 'Rudy' said he was abused by other students in a religious boarding school.<sup>145</sup> He told the Commissioner:

The school tries to put out this anti-bullying thing, but it's like you open the door to a mansion to find a pigsty. A hundred per cent propaganda is what they put out. All of this is managed by the people at the top of the pyramid and they don't ever look down at the people beneath them. It's all the theory.<sup>146</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Family circumstances

Children and young people did not always describe their family circumstances during private sessions. When they did, they most often described having at least one parent or carer who was responsible for their wellbeing. This was true irrespective of whether or not the child lived with their parents. Children without at least one protective adult in their lives were in the minority.

Parents and carers who attended a private session on behalf of children who had been sexually abused spoke more readily about family circumstances than children and young people who spoke to Commissioners on their own. Parents told Commissioners how much they loved their children and how concerned they were for their wellbeing. Many had tried to protect their children from the child sexual abuse, but out-of-home care providers and government departments neglected to act on their warnings. Some believed their rights as biological parents were not respected and their voices were not valued.

Some parents and carers acknowledged they had been overly trusting of perpetrators or the institution. They told Commissioners how they had misinterpreted perpetrators' grooming behaviours as acts of kindness and generosity. Some parents and carers believed the family's trust in the perpetrator or institution made it difficult for the victim to recognise or understand that what was happening to them was sexual abuse. Others felt their misplaced trust may have prevented their children from disclosing sooner.

#### 4.4.4 Personal characteristics

Some survivors identified personal characteristics they believed made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse. All these factors were outside the control of the child. It is important to emphasise that sexual abuse is never the fault of the child.

Many children and young people told Commissioners they believed their limited knowledge and understanding of child sexual abuse had made them vulnerable to the abuse. Survivors said they looked to adults for guidance. In some cases, they trusted the perpetrator when the perpetrator told them what was happening was 'normal'.<sup>147</sup>

Other survivors, especially those who experienced placement instability in out-of-home care, had limited access to an adult they trusted who could have explained child sexual abuse to them. 'Brianna', who described being physically and sexually abused by a foster carer, explained to the Commissioner 'it wasn't until we got older that we learnt that it was wrong, and that they weren't allowed to do that'.<sup>148</sup>

In some cases, victims knew that what they were experiencing was wrong but they had no one to tell and/or they did not have the language to talk about it. In many cases, this was because they were physically isolated from parents. Survivors who had experienced sexual abuse in out-of-home care and boarding schools were more likely than others to indicate to Commissioners that they had no one to tell.

## Survivor accounts: Education and out-of-home care institutions

Many children and young people attending private sessions said they were sexually abused in contemporary out-of-home care (35.4 per cent) and/or in a school setting (27.4 per cent).

The stories of 'Toby' and 'Brianna' that follow, are illustrative of many of the themes discussed throughout Section 4.4, 'Circumstances at the time of the abuse'.

### 'Toby' at school camp

'Toby's' mother, 'Gaby', attended a private session to describe 'Toby's' experience of sexual abuse by two boys when he was nine years old and on a school camp.<sup>149</sup> Gaby's account highlights some of the common themes observed in sexual abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours, and illustrates how aspects of society, culture and the institution can be the broader contexts to victims' experiences of abuse. These themes include:

- inadequate supervision of children with a history of harmful physical behaviours
- the co-occurrence of physical violence with sexual abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours
- institutional responses that minimise, dismiss or disbelieve the victim's account of the abuse
- institutional leaders with an inadequate understanding of the nature and impacts of child sexual abuse, including sexual abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours.

#### **'Toby' at school camp: supervision, bullying and institutional responses**

'Toby' was reluctant to attend his primary school's Year 4 camp. Once there, he was put into a shared cabin with four other boys – two quiet boys and two loud boys.

During shower time, he was sexually abused by the two loud boys in his cabin. The two quiet boys tried to intervene and stop the abuse. 'Toby' immediately reported the sexual abuse to his teacher. The deputy principal then phoned his mother, 'Gaby', who asked to speak with 'Toby'. The deputy principal told 'Gaby' that would be hard because 'there were a lot of children downstairs and it would be difficult to find him'. The deputy principal did find 'Toby' but told 'Gaby' that 'she had to be quick'.



'Gaby' spoke to 'Toby' for two minutes. 'Toby' stayed at camp. 'Gaby' found out later that he did not want to stay but felt he had to. He did not want to leave the two quiet boys alone with the two loud boys who had abused him.

On his return home, 'Toby' told his mother that the abuse had involved 'putting penises in his bottom', and that he had told this to the deputy principal at camp.

'Gaby' discovered that 'Toby' was pressured to change his account of events by the principal when the children returned to school. 'Toby' had returned home one day very upset and told his mother that the principal had put him in a room with the children who had sexually abused him and told to 'come up with a single story'. 'Gaby' recounted 'Toby's' words in the private session:

I don't know, mummy. I don't know if 'Jason' took off my top while 'Alan' chanted or 'Alan' took off my top while 'Jason' chanted ... I don't know the right answer. I'm terribly sorry.

'Gaby' later found out that the two loud boys exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours were known to be 'very disturbed' and act with 'very violent behaviours'. 'Gaby' believed the teachers had failed to consider the safety of 'Toby' and the two quiet boys when they put them in the same cabin with the loud boys. When 'Gaby' tried to pursue this by calling the deputy principal, she was told not to contact the school outside of school hours.

'Toby's' performance at school deteriorated, he started describing himself as 'stupid', and other children teased him after details of the abuse became public. 'Gaby' met with the principal to discuss 'Toby's' decline in reading. The principal said she was always pleased to meet with parents who wanted support for their children because then she could explain that 'there was no money for that sort of thing'. 'Gaby' told the Commissioner, 'I was like scum beneath her feet'.

'Gaby' also met with the director responsible for overseeing schools in the area. The director described the abuse as 'kiddy fiddling'. He told 'Gaby' that neither he nor the school principal were senior enough to do anything about the situation. 'Gaby' told the Commissioner: 'I'm used to bureaucracies but I felt completely deflated by the lack of power I had as a parent as opposed to my normal powerful stance'.<sup>150</sup>

### **‘Brianna’ in out-of-home care**

‘Brianna’ was 19 when she told the Royal Commission about her experience of sexual, physical and psychological abuse perpetrated by an adult male foster carer.<sup>151</sup> ‘Brianna’s’ story highlights many of the recurrent themes we heard in private sessions with children and young people, including:

- child sexual abuse perpetrated by a foster carer
- children with limited knowledge or understanding of child sexual abuse
- lack of access to protective adults at the time of and following the child sexual abuse
- physical and psychological abuse alongside child sexual abuse
- ineffective support for the survivor following the disclosure of child sexual abuse
- trauma from child sexual abuse shaping the child’s sense of identity and relationships with others
- the ongoing need for support to maintain mental health and wellbeing for survivors.

#### **‘Brianna’s’ story of sexual, emotional and physical abuse**

‘Brianna’ spent most of her childhood in out-of-home care. As a five-year-old, ‘Brianna’ remembered being physically beaten and having to watch her three siblings being punished:

They would make us line up and hit us. They would give us salt and pepper, make us eat soap, or hit us with a wooden spoon or belt ... Having to watch each other get hit, that wasn’t good.

None of the children knew that what was happening was wrong or that they could report it to welfare officers. She explained that on one occasion, her foster father, ‘Sherman’, beat her with a pool cue as her sister hid under the table:

I was crying on my hands and knees. I just looked at her, and I remember putting my hand up to my face and seeing blood on my hand. I just kept looking at my sister ... At that point, after someone hits you so much, you can’t feel it.

‘Sherman’ began sexually abusing ‘Brianna’ soon after she moved in. ‘Brianna’ believed that ‘Sherman’s’ wife, ‘Janet’, was complicit in the abuse and on at least one occasion encouraged ‘Brianna’s’ sister to sleep in ‘Sherman’s’ bed.

At one point 'Brianna' disclosed the abuse to an extended family member because she was 'hurting'. The family member reported 'Sherman' and 'Janet' to the police. 'Sherman' pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of indecent assault. 'Brianna' was upset that the sexual abuse was not fully investigated. She and her siblings remained in the care of 'Janet', who continued to physically abuse them. During that period 'Brianna' spent some time in counselling. She started to act out and was eventually moved to several different foster homes. 'Brianna' left foster care and quit school in her final year, after experiencing insomnia, anxiety and depression: 'I did end up feeling like I'd lost a part of myself over time, and I still don't know where she's gone'.

'Brianna' told the Commissioner about the impacts of the abuse on her daily life. She contemplated suicide and continues to battle depression. 'Brianna' has limited contact with her siblings, though still cares for them a lot. She told the Commissioner that it was 'a bit hard to be a family when we're all just kind of broken'.

'Brianna' now keeps herself busy, working long hours in a job she loves. 'I want to earn the money, I want to keep myself occupied. I don't want to let myself dwell.' She has recently signed up as an emergency services volunteer, and has plans to apply for a job in the Australian Defence Force. 'Brianna' understands that she needs ongoing support to help her 'keep looking towards the light'. She is critical that despite all the suffering and sexual abuse he inflicted, 'Sherman' was not punished for his crimes and gets to 'live happily ever after'.<sup>152</sup>

## 4.5 Experiences of disclosure

---

This section describes children and young people's experiences of disclosure, including how disclosure was facilitated and the barriers that prevented disclosure. Survivors and their families also described institutional responses to the disclosure of child sexual abuse and how they felt about these responses.

Analysis of children and young people's stories suggested disclosure of child sexual abuse was not always intentional, nor was it a one off event. This aligns with survivors' accounts discussed in Section 3.5 Chapter 3 of this volume.

The majority of children and young people discussed at least one aspect of their various experiences of disclosure with Commissioners. Their stories confirmed disclosure was a process that involved telling and re-telling their story over time to various family members, institutional representatives and people in government authorities. Disclosures were made to different people at different times and in varying levels of detail. Victims commonly disclosed only part of the story initially, and provided more detail over time – sometimes as a result of acquiring more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the life-long impacts of child sexual abuse.

Of the 70.9 per cent of children and young people who indicated to Commissioners the person to whom they had first disclosed, 53.5 per cent said they first disclosed to a parent, 23.3 per cent said their first disclosure was to a person in authority inside the institution and 21.8 per cent said they first disclosed to police.

Many parents and carers reported the abuse to institutional authorities or the police after their child disclosed to them. In the majority of cases, victims were believed by their parents the first time they disclosed.

Among the 46.3 per cent of children and young people who described barriers to disclosing child sexual abuse, one-quarter (25.0 per cent) said they felt shame and embarrassment and one in five (20.5 per cent) feared retribution. A slightly smaller proportion (16.7 per cent) suggested that they did not have the language to explain what happened to them. A total of 14.4 per cent said they did not know the behaviour was not okay, and 12.1 per cent had no one to disclose to.

#### 4.5.1 Circumstances of disclosure

Survivors' recollections suggest children and young people disclosed child sexual abuse when timing, relationships and circumstances make it easiest for them to do so. Survivors told Commissioners about disclosing when adults close by were paying attention. They explained that disclosure was sometimes intentional, and sometimes unintentional or facilitated. Some survivors explained the child sexual abuse was witnessed by others who disclosed the abuse on their behalf.

In some cases, survivors' parents and carers disclosed the sexual abuse to the institution where the abuse took place and to other authorities. Many parents and carers told Commissioners they were motivated to disclose because they wanted to protect the victim and other children. Some disclosed to seek justice and access support.

Among the 83.9 per cent of children and young people who discussed details of disclosure, 79.5 per cent disclosed as a child. Many disclosed immediately and sometimes in the context of everyday conversation. 'Emily's' mother, 'Kathrin' told the Commissioner she had found out from 'Emily' about the sexual abuse the day it happened.<sup>153</sup> 'Kathrin' explained she and 'Emily' were discussing 'Emily's' day. 'Emily' had told her, 'Mummy, I played with 'Toby'. But Mummy he made a bad choice.' 'Emily' revealed more details of the sexual abuse in further conversations.<sup>154</sup>

Some survivors explained the abuse was discovered or witnessed by others, who reported it at the time or soon after. Sometimes, this occurred when the child displayed physical symptoms of violence or abuse, such as marks on the body or redness and soreness around the genitals. Children who had been unable to describe or express what had happened to them relied on others to look out for their safety. 'Sondra's' teenage daughter, 'Mackenzie', had shown signs of distress, but had been unable to communicate what had been happening to her.<sup>155</sup> 'Sondra' told the Commissioner she found out eight months later her daughter had been sexually abused. She said two workers at the respite centre where 'Mackenzie' was living had witnessed 'inappropriate behaviour' by a co-worker and reported it, though 'Sondra' was only told after police started investigating the incident.

Children and young people who took longer than one year to disclose often made partial disclosures at the time of the abuse or tried to communicate their distress. Other survivors told Commissioners they disclosed more completely to a teacher, psychologist or family member once they had understood sexual abuse was wrong. Some of these survivors disclosed following a discussion about child sexual abuse in class or on the television. At the time of the abuse, 'Jackson' had told his mother the perpetrator had kissed him during an audition.<sup>156</sup> After he heard public discussion of child sexual abuse two years later, 'Jackson' was able to explain more clearly what had occurred. Then he told his mother, the police and attended a private session at the Royal Commission.

#### 4.5.2 Barriers and facilitators to disclosure

Children and young people told Commissioners that some people and situations had helped them to disclose while others had prevented them doing so. Disclosures were facilitated when trusted adults took the time and paid attention to the child's behaviour. This often took a considerable period, especially for children with limited verbal skills. 'Samantha' told the story of her son, six-year-old 'Jordan'.<sup>157</sup> 'Samantha' and teachers at the special class he attended had noticed he had changed and was no longer a 'happy-go-lucky child'. 'Samantha' told the Commissioner 'Jordan's' disclosure came about one day when his teacher 'gently [questioned him] to find what was troubling him'. 'Jordan' had 'pointed to his penis and his mouth and his bum' and then 'pulled his pants down in the middle of the playground'. Further inquiry found that 'Jordan' was one of many children with disability being sexually abused by the school bus driver.

Careful attention did not always guarantee disclosure or discovery of the sexual abuse. Several parents who attended private sessions told Commissioners they had noticed changes in their child's behaviour. Some had been concerned by physical symptoms they later learned were due to sexual abuse. In two separate accounts, parents had sought medical advice after noticing redness and soreness around their child's genitals.<sup>158</sup> In both cases doctors told the parents the child had worms. These parents later realised the child was presenting physical evidence of sexual abuse.

Many children and young people told Commissioners they had tried to tell someone about the abuse and their attempts were dismissed. One mother told the Commissioner her son had suggested women could be perpetrators too. She had laughed at him and only later understood he had been trying to tell her about sexual abuse by a female house parent at his boarding school. Another parent, 'Beth Mary', recalled being interrupted by the phone ringing when her daughter was trying to talk to her.<sup>159</sup> In hindsight she realised her daughter was trying to tell her about sexual abuse by the classroom teacher.

Parents and carers told Commissioners communication was difficult for some victims, especially those who were very young or who had some impairment and did not have the language to talk about their experience of abuse. Instead, these children communicated their distress in non-verbal ways through changes in behaviour. Their behaviours were described as 'acting out' by the adults around them and some children refused to go to school or get on the school bus. Others behaved in ways interpreted as regressing, such as wetting the bed. A few lost the ability to read.

#### 4.5.3 Responses to disclosure of child sexual abuse

Responses to the disclosure of child sexual abuse tended to vary depending on who was told. Many parents and carers told Commissioners the institution where the child sexual abuse occurred sought to protect its reputation, and in some cases, protect the perpetrator. Some parents and carers felt they were silenced by institutions or told to keep quiet about the details of the abuse. Many told Commissioners of situations where institutions questioned the veracity of victims' reports of sexual abuse. Sometimes authorities suggested the child was 'making up stories'.<sup>160</sup> 'Marissa' approached the manager of a childcare centre her child, 'Lucas', attended. 'Marissa' said the manager said she did not believe 'Lucas's' account of events and defended the perpetrator, saying 'Don't say anything like that, you could jeopardise his career. He loves his job'.<sup>161</sup>

Other parents and carers described institutions becoming defensive and told Commissioners institutional authorities often blamed or threatened them. Some questioned their intentions when they tried to raise the issue of child sexual abuse. 'Chantelle' attended a private session to describe her daughter's experience of sexual abuse in a government-run school for children with disability.<sup>162</sup> 'Chantelle' said the director had called her one day to tell her 'Daisy' was found on the floor with her shirt off and her shorts and underpants around her ankles, crying and screaming, punching the boy standing over her and trying to get up. When 'Chantelle' asked the director to take the abuse seriously, the director raised her voice in a threatening manner. She said 'Chantelle' was a 'vindictive person' who had gone from 'protecting her child to hurting the principal's reputation'. 'Chantelle' told the Commissioner, 'I just cried. I was just trying to get justice for my daughter'.

Children and young people often said they received dismissive responses from authorities when they reported bullying and being sexually abused by other children. Survivors and their families described how their concerns were brushed off even in cases where evidence of the abuse was indisputable. ‘Velma’ attended a private session and described the sexual abuse her six-year-old daughter, ‘Gabby’, experienced by another child at after-school care.<sup>163</sup> ‘Velma’ said the abuse was physically brutal and involved penetration. She was disturbed by the obstructive and dismissive response from the director of the after-school care centre when she reported the abuse. She told the Commissioner:

They wanted to go with a version that it didn’t happen. When I got that result about the sperm I spoke to [the director] about it and she said to me, ‘Sorry, I’m not going to discuss this with you because I don’t agree with you’. And that really upset me ... I mean, I had proper solid physical evidence ... and they still wanted to brush me off.<sup>164</sup>

‘Velma’ believed the institution sought to protect and prioritise its reputation ahead of ‘Gabby’s’ and other children’s welfare. Other parents were not told of the child sexual abuse and the centre threatened to sue ‘Velma’:

They threatened to sue me. Why would I lie about that? ... That I was doing it to destroy the school’s reputation, which I wasn’t ... The quality of care should have changed while my daughter was still at school and it didn’t.<sup>165</sup>

Parents and carers of children with disability told Commissioners they believed institutions were particularly ill-equipped to respond effectively to sexual abuse when the child exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours also had disability. In many cases, the child’s abusive behaviours were excused due to intellectual or developmental disability. ‘Ingrid’s’ mother, ‘Marla’, explained authorities in the institution where the sexual abuse occurred ‘kept making excuses for his behaviours, basically, because he was in the special education unit’.<sup>166</sup> ‘Ingrid’ was moved to a mainstream school after she was abused, but ‘Marla’ said she was abused again by a different boy. In this instance, ‘Marla’ said that the principal reported the abuse immediately and suspended the child exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.<sup>167</sup>

#### 4.5.4 Survivors’ reactions to what happened when they disclosed

Children, young people and their parents expressed frustration to Commissioners at what they perceived as the failure of institutions to respond effectively to disclosures of child sexual abuse. In many cases, poor institutional response served to heighten the trauma the victim and their family already experienced as they dealt with the ongoing impacts of abuse. While some children and young people were believed by police when they reported the abuse, some said they were disillusioned when police did not lay charges or when charges were dropped.

Children and young people were often sceptical about trusting institutions to care for their welfare following inadequate responses to reports of bullying. Survivors commonly explained this was the case when they knew adults had witnessed bullying but had done nothing to protect the victim. 'Rudy' was bullied before and after being sexually abused by other children at boarding school.<sup>168</sup> He told the Commissioner he was distressed by the assault, but that being disbelieved, ignored and shamed by the school hierarchy was worse. 'Rudy' said the school's response had 'changed my perception of the world':

I never put too much faith in somebody ... Not that I don't trust them, but [it's] not, 'He will do that', [it's more like], 'He will probably do that', kind of thing. It has made me pessimistic. It's, I would say – and this is kind of contradictory – I'm no longer naive.<sup>169</sup>

### Survivor account: A parent's experience of disclosure

Parents and carers were more likely to describe their experience of disclosing to institutional authorities than children and young people attending a private session themselves. Many parents and carers suggested they had not involved the victim when they approached the institution in an attempt to protect them from further trauma. Their reports of disclosing the child sexual abuse to authorities were similar, regardless of the institution where the abuse took place. Common themes from parents' private sessions included institutions and authorities:

- not protecting the child's rights, acting in the child's best interests or complying with procedures
- not acting on, or inadequately responding to, reports of child sexual abuse
- not keeping parents informed about their child's wellbeing at the time of and following the abuse
- threatening parents when they raised concerns about their child's safety and wellbeing.

'Lexie's' experience, which follows, reflects these themes.<sup>170</sup> 'Lexie' was a parent of three teenage children in foster care. Her daughter, 'Olivia', was sexually abused by her foster father.

While 'Lexie's' experience of disclosure was mostly negative, she described one example of good procedural practice when she disclosed the abuse to the local police. She told the Commissioner the detective followed child protection procedures and provided ongoing support for her family.



### **‘Lexie’s’ experience of being dismissed and betrayed**

‘Lexie’s’ three children, ‘Olivia’, ‘Brittany’ and ‘Kyle’, were placed in out-of-home care after ‘Lexie’ and her husband experienced financial difficulties and housing instability. The children returned home regularly for visits.

From the beginning, ‘Lexie’ had ‘clashed’ with her children’s caseworker. ‘Lexie’ told the Commissioner the caseworker ‘actually threatened me in my house. I had a dislike for her. The caseworker said “I can keep your kids in care until they’re 18”’.

‘Lexie’ became concerned about her daughter, ‘Olivia’, when she found out ‘Olivia’ had been given an expensive mobile phone by her foster carer. ‘Lexie’ alerted the caseworker when she found inappropriate photos on the phone of her seven-year-old son, ‘Kyle’. The caseworker’s response to ‘Lexie’ was dismissive, saying ‘Oh, it’s just kids playing’.

Following the discovery of the phone, text messages and photos, and prompted by ‘Lexie’, ‘Olivia’ revealed she was being sexually abused by her foster father. ‘Lexie’ and ‘Olivia’ reported the matter to the police. ‘Lexie’s’ description of the police response is one of a number of positive police experiences reported by survivors:

They said, ‘There is no way those kids are going back to that house’. He [the detective] was there from the beginning and even three, four years later, he’s sitting there in court with me.

During the trial, ‘Lexie’ learned ‘Olivia’ had told her caseworker about the sexual abuse many months before ‘Lexie’ found out. ‘Lexie’ expressed a sense of betrayal that she had not been informed about the abuse by the child protection authorities:

These people are protecting my children from me, but they’re not protecting them from their own workers. What pisses me off the most is the fact Child Protection knew something was going on in August, September and October – yet nothing was done.<sup>171</sup>

## 4.6 Wellbeing

---

Many parents who told Commissioners about the sexual abuse their children experienced described its impact on their child's wellbeing, both when the abuse occurred and at the time of the private session. Many also described the effect of their child's experiences on their own wellbeing as they tried to support them and deal with institutions' mostly ineffective responses.

### 4.6.1 Impacts on children and young people

Most children and young people (76.8 per cent) described at least one impact of being sexually abused. Among these survivors, the vast majority (90.9 per cent) explained they experienced mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress following the child sexual abuse. Of the children and young people who reported information about their wellbeing, 26 (11.9 per cent) reported a suicide attempt, 43 (19.6 per cent) reported self-harm, and 6.9 per cent reported both self-harm and a suicide attempt. Children and young people told Commissioners they had gone from being happy or independent children to being frightened, angry and anxious. Several told Commissioners they had started to wet the bed and have nightmares. In his private session 'Tyler' told the Commissioner it had been two or three years since the abuse and he 'had trouble dealing with it'.<sup>172</sup> He said:

I sit in bed of a night trying to sleep. I can't sleep 'cause these voices just keep kicking over you know, like it's just got that out of control you think, I can't deal with this no more. I need to do something about it or fucking lose. Just give up the fight all together.<sup>173</sup>

Other children and young people talked about how they became hyper-vigilant and developed behaviours and rituals in an attempt to protect themselves from further abuse or to ease their experience of anxiety. Some had thoughts of suicide or engaged in self-harm. 'Elana' described her daughter 'Georgia April' as loving school and the whole process of learning prior to being sexually abused by her Grade 4 teacher.<sup>174</sup> 'Elana' said 'Georgia April' had developed 'daily, self-protective rituals' and had told 'Elana' she 'hated her body and wanted to kill herself'.<sup>175</sup>

Children and young people told Commissioners their experience of child sexual abuse had shaped their relationships with others. Many young people felt the abuse had affected their transition from childhood to adulthood and their capacity for intimate relationships. Many, especially those who had been sexually abused by children with harmful sexual behaviours, had difficulty trusting others. Others said they were wary of forming friendships and found it difficult to fit in.

In rare instances, survivors described how they had been able to draw something positive from their experiences. 'Tyler' told the Commissioner he had not spoken openly about the abuse but believed he was now more sympathetic to women who had experienced sexual assault.<sup>176</sup> 'Out of it, I sort of respect women a bit more ... so it's given me one upside. That's about it.'<sup>177</sup>

Several parents said their children displayed sexualised behaviours following the abuse, though few described the behaviours in detail. 'Samantha' told the Commissioner her six-year-old son, 'Jordan', started to exhibit sexualised behaviours after undergoing counselling.<sup>178</sup> 'Samantha' cancelled his counselling and bought him a dog, which she thought had helped because it gave him 'someone to love, someone to help with his bedwetting and his nightmares, the tooth grinding'.<sup>179</sup>

Some children and young people described changes in their approach to education or missing out on educational opportunities. Most said their participation at school was affected in the immediate aftermath of the abuse. For some survivors, their drop in participation was temporary. For others, the effect was more sustained as they left school early or could no longer focus on their education. 'Gaby' commented that her son 'Toby' lost confidence and his reading deteriorated after he was bullied and abused at school camp.<sup>180</sup> She told the Commissioner he was 'still less confident, but there had been gains'.

Many survivors believed the abuse interrupted, disturbed and changed the direction of their lives. The mental health impacts of the abuse made it difficult to stay at school, concentrate on education, and negotiate relationships. 'Jordan' was 15 when he was abused at his boarding school.<sup>181</sup> His parents, 'Kurt' and 'Lisa', who attended a private session with him, told the Commissioner 'Jordan' became a recluse after the abuse. He lost interest in schoolwork and sport, shut himself in his room and did not make contact with peers.

#### 4.6.2 Impacts on parents, carers and families

Parents and carers often described how the sexual abuse of their child had impacted on their own wellbeing. They described experiencing sleeplessness, anxiety, nightmares and panic attacks. For some parents, their child's experience triggered memories of their own childhood trauma, which exacerbated these symptoms. Most perceived a direct connection between their child's experience of abuse and issues with their own mental health, relationships, finances, employment and careers.

Many parents and carers felt guilty in cases where the perpetrator had groomed them and/or their child. They felt responsible because they had not recognised or had missed warning signs that, if acted upon, may have prevented the abuse. 'Elana' told the Commissioner, 'You feel [guilty] because you kept sending them there. I think it's that disbelief, how could it be happening in a school with everyone around? It plays with your mind'.<sup>182</sup>

Parents and carers commonly described the burden of being responsible for maintaining the wellbeing of the child and simultaneously dealing with dismissive or threatening institutional responses. Parents told Commissioners that managing these two fronts compounded their experiences of trauma. Parents of victims who had been sexually abused by a child with harmful sexual behaviours were worried not only for their child, but also about other children who remained in the institution. Many parents of victims also worried about the child exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours. 'Kathrin' described the effect of being disbelieved after she reported her daughter's sexual abuse by another child at after-school care.<sup>183</sup> She told the Commissioner, 'I can deal with what happened to 'Emily' ... but I can't deal with what happened afterwards with the school. I can't. It was traumatising'.<sup>184</sup>

Other parents and carers described feelings of rage and anger. These feelings were made worse by institutional responses that left them powerless to obtain justice for their child and family. 'Alfreda' told the Commissioner, 'I was an absolute mental case and wanted to kill every person in sight. I was just enraged'.<sup>185</sup>

Some parents of children who had been abused by an adult authority figure indicated their relationships with friends, and the wider community in general, changed as a result of reporting the abuse. Parents described to Commissioners how they and their extended families were ostracised by their community after details of the abuse became public. Parents said it was because the institution and perpetrator were held in such high regard within the community, the majority of community members were closed to any suggestion child sexual abuse had occurred.

People who came from tight-knit religious communities appeared to be especially affected when members of their community were told of the abuse. 'Peter' and 'Beth Mary' told the Commissioner that in the late 2000s, they were ostracised and isolated by their Catholic school community, together with other families who reported abuse.<sup>186</sup> This was despite the perpetrator being charged and found guilty of child sexual abuse. 'We got told that we were wrecking a great school community and ruining a good man's life', 'Peter' explained to the Commissioner.

'Peter' and 'Beth Mary' were united in their concern for their daughter. However, their experience following the abuse changed their world view and impacted on their relationships. They became less trusting of others and of each other. 'Peter' told the Commissioner, 'Sixteen years ago we had one of the best marriages you would ever see. People would look at us and go, "You guys are fantastic". Now, we struggle to stay together'.<sup>187</sup>

Other parents suggested that their relationship with their spouse suffered because they held different views about if and how they should respond to the abuse. Conflict arose when one parent valued or trusted the institution and the other did not. 'Nola' believed her son was being groomed by a teacher and wanted to pursue the matter to protect both her son and other children at the school.<sup>188</sup> Her husband, an 'old boy' of the school, thought she was over-reacting and should forget the whole thing. 'Nola's' husband told her that if she chose to go to the Royal Commission, their marriage would end in divorce. Despite the conflict it caused in her relationship, 'Nola' persevered and the teacher was dismissed. At the time of her private session, 'Nola' and her husband were still together.<sup>189</sup>

### Survivor accounts: The ripple effects of child sexual abuse

Many parents told Commissioners that the sexual abuse of their child had affected their confidence in parenting. Some became overprotective. Others questioned their ability to protect and parent their children. In many cases, the trauma and emotional needs of the survivor had financial repercussions. 'Helen Christine' and 'Brian' attended a private session to describe the abuse that their son, 'Robert', experienced at a respite care facility.<sup>190</sup> Their story, which follows, highlights many of the ripple effects of child sexual abuse on parents and families, including:

- doubting their capacity and confidence to parent and look after their child
- the impact of abuse on relationships between family members
- a sense of failure and lack of confidence in supporting their child following abuse
- employment insecurity and financial strain following the abuse
- the value of being listened to and feeling heard.

### **The impact of child sexual abuse on ‘Helen Christine’, ‘Brian’ and ‘Robert’**

‘Robert’ was 14 when he was placed in temporary respite care on the advice of child protection authorities. ‘Robert’ had autism and limited verbal communication skills. Several months later, on his return home from temporary care, ‘Robert’ disclosed that he had been sexually abused.

At home, ‘Robert’ began to display inappropriate sexual behaviours with his younger siblings. His mother, ‘Helen Christine’ told the Commissioner that child protection authorities insisted ‘Robert’ be supervised by two adults at all times if he were to remain with family. ‘Robert’s’ father, ‘Brian’, left work so he could supervise his children. This placed financial strain on the family, and ‘Brian’ did not like being unemployed. At the same time, he struggled to come to terms with ‘Robert’s’ sexualised behaviour.

At the private session, ‘Brian’ spoke of how he had reappraised his relationship with his son and his responsibilities as a father. ‘Brian’s’ account demonstrates his courage and commitment to looking after his son and family:

Because of the incident ... I didn’t want to see him. I didn’t know what my reaction to him would be as a father. [But] when he came back I thought ... every adult male figure in your life has let you down and nobody has shown you anything but violence, how to mistreat people, that type of thing. So I saw him and I thought, well okay it’s my turn to teach him forgiveness.

‘Brian’ engaged with ‘Robert’ to teach him about appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. ‘I sat down and had a chat with him, and since then, I can honestly say I have not seen any of those behaviours.’

‘Helen Christine’ told the Commissioner being unable to protect ‘Robert’ from the abuse made her feel like a failure. She said, ‘it was like my whole motherhood was slandered’. She said the situation ‘has scarred all of us’, and ‘Robert’s’ siblings’ spirits had ‘dropped dramatically with everything that’s happened’.

‘Helen Christine’ told the Commissioner she had hope for her family. Since the abuse, the family had moved to a new neighbourhood which had better support services, including a ‘great school’.<sup>191</sup>

### 4.6.3 Sources of strength and survival

#### Children and young people

Children and young people who attended private sessions described sources of strength and support that were broadly similar to those adult survivors described. Children and young people felt supported when they:

- had someone to talk to
- had access to counselling
- perceived that the institution or perpetrator had been held to account.

Most children and young people relied on their family and friends as their primary source of support. Parents of victims of sexual abuse often told Commissioners they were generally responsible for seeking help on behalf of their child. In many cases, this help included counselling. Many children and young people, as well as their families, believed counselling had been beneficial, though it was often ‘hard work’.<sup>192</sup> Other parents did not find counselling helpful. As described earlier in this chapter, ‘Samantha’ believed that counselling had exacerbated her six-year-old son’s sexualised behaviour. Getting a dog on the other hand, had helped him ‘enormously’.<sup>193</sup>

Young people without family support told Commissioners of additional difficulties they experienced managing their lives. These young people often relied on support from mental health services and advocacy groups. Other children and young people drew on internal resources to help get them through difficult periods. ‘Tyler’ was serving a prison sentence at the time of his private session and said the abuse still haunted him.<sup>194</sup> He told the Commissioner that despite his thoughts of being out of control and wanting to ‘hang meself’, he looked forward to the future. He wanted to ‘kick a goal’ in another state once he had served his prison sentence.

Some children, especially those who had been abused in a school setting, found moving schools had improved their wellbeing. Some said they had moved schools or moved out of the area where the abuse had occurred entirely. Survivors and families who perceived a new school as supportive and one that placed a high value on children’s safety and wellbeing were happy with the change. Moving was difficult for many children with disability in regional areas due to the lack of alternative facilities and support services in small communities.

'Elise' told the Commissioner moving school had been a positive experience for her daughter, 'Katie':

The school has offered 'Katie' a counsellor and have given her a pass, so that if she's feeling pressured or if she feels upset, she can leave the class and just go to a quiet area. They've been nothing but continually supportive.<sup>195</sup>

Other families told Commissioners they had chosen not to change schools to avoid the impression they or their child were somehow at fault. Survivors who received additional support and in some cases counselling felt staying at the same school had been the best choice.

## Parents, carers and families

Many parents and carers told Commissioners they were motivated to keep going both by the love they felt towards their child and the responsibility they felt for protecting other children. In cases of sexual abuse by a child with harmful sexual behaviours, this sense of concern and responsibility often extended to the child who had abused their child. Many parents explained in the private sessions that they had to stay strong for their children and sought formal and informal support. Staying strong was especially challenging for parents who had their own history of trauma.

Other parents and carers found strength in having their experiences heard and believed. Many survivors told Commissioners they found value in attending a private session but had not been heard to the same extent by the institution. 'Helen Christine' and 'Brian' attended a private session to describe the abuse of their son 'Robert' and the impact on their family (see Section 4.6.2).<sup>196</sup> 'Helen Christine' told the Commissioner:

This is my first time being able to – I suppose, my turn to talk, really isn't it? These meetings we go to, and these services, we don't tend to get to say what we go through. They've never really heard our side of the story.<sup>197</sup>



Others told Commissioners they were motivated to seek justice. They wanted the perpetrator and institution to be held accountable for the sexual abuse of their child. Many parents displayed persistence in this endeavour, often in the face of institutions continuing to dismiss, disbelieve or minimise the abuse. 'Chantelle' said her daughter, 'Daisy', was abused in a government-run school for children with disabilities.<sup>198</sup> 'Chantelle' told the Commissioner she hoped to make some contribution to change in the future by speaking up: 'I don't care how many doors I get that are closed, because hopefully they'll pass it onto somebody else who may leave it open'.

Like adult survivors, pursuing justice sometimes took a toll on parents and carers of children and young people who were victims of child sexual abuse. Survivors and their families alike felt anger and disappointment when criminal charges did not proceed to court. Many parents felt angry when they learned police would not press charges because their child was not considered a credible witness. This was more common when the child was very young or for children with disability.

Parents and carers with experiences of the criminal justice system often recounted that court procedures were not always a productive avenue for addressing the trauma of the abuse. Many survivors were re-traumatised by giving evidence. The trauma was exacerbated by protracted investigations. 'Rose' told the Commissioner the court process compounded the stress she was already feeling following a childcare centre director's attempts at minimising her daughter's experience of abuse.<sup>199</sup> She told the Commissioner:

That was the most stressful part of the whole process. The disclosure was stressful enough and then there's a huge emotional fallout from that, and then secrecy and not knowing who to tell and then regretting telling certain people, and it's just horrendous, and you feel so shameful and underground. It's horrible. But in the court case you're expected to accept an awful lot of what seemed illogical and unfair.<sup>200</sup>

# 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

## 5.1 Overview

---

Chapter 5 describes the common themes that emerged from our analysis of the experiences of child sexual abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors. It reveals their strength and courage, often in the face of immense pain and trauma, in describing the circumstances of the abuse, including, for many, being forcibly removed from their families as children and then sexually abused in the institutions that were meant to protect them and keep them safe.

We conducted:

- qualitative analysis of a sample of 60 narratives written from the accounts given during private sessions by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors
- quantitative analysis of the accounts given during private sessions of 985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors.

### 5.1.1 Historical context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a distinct experience of institutionalisation and abuse in institutions. Multiple national and state inquiries have found the abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a collective experience, with its roots in colonisation and dispossession, disconnection from culture and protectionist and assimilationist policies.<sup>201</sup>

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions were forcibly removed from their families under Aboriginal Protection Acts. Others experienced the collective trauma caused by the forced removal of whole families and communities under these racially discriminatory laws. The effects of forced removal are widely acknowledged to be 'far-reaching and complex and often compounded in subsequent generations'.<sup>202</sup>

The *Bringing them home* report into child removal policies states that, 'it is not possible to state with any precision how many children were forcibly removed'.<sup>203</sup> In some communities all children were removed, and between 1910 and 1970 it is estimated that 'not one family escaped the effects of forcible removal'.<sup>204</sup> The report outlines the impacts of assimilation on contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It found:

Most significantly the actions of the past resonate in the present and will continue to do so in the future. The laws, policies and practices which separated Indigenous children from their families have contributed directly to the alienation of Indigenous societies today.<sup>205</sup>

While all children are potentially vulnerable to abuse in situations where people have ‘access to, privacy with and authority over children’, racially discriminatory policies and racist social attitudes are likely to have increased the vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in institutions.<sup>206</sup> The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found ‘Aboriginal people have a unique history of being ordered, controlled and monitored by the State’.<sup>207</sup> Placement and restriction legislation gave Chief Protectors, or their equivalent in each jurisdiction, complete authority over all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s lives – to move them onto and in between missions and reserves, to forcibly separate children from their families and to prohibit cultural practice and language. Later, under child welfare legislation in some jurisdictions, a child could be judged neglected on the basis of Aboriginality alone.<sup>208</sup>

Under legislation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents had no rights to advocate for or protect their children.<sup>209</sup> These laws meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were over-represented in residential institutions where there was limited or no oversight from authorities – on missions, in dormitories and on remote stations.

### 5.1.2 Telling your story

Sharing an experience of child sexual abuse is difficult. It is painful, distressing and deeply personal. The burden of guilt and shame can be overwhelming. The survivor has to trust that the person they tell will take care of them and the information they disclose. Reliving the trauma of abuse hurts. It can also make the survivor vulnerable to further trauma and abuse.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors bear the additional weight of collective and intergenerational trauma from the forced removal of children from their families, their land and their culture. The shame many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel as survivors of child sexual abuse is inseparable from the shame they were made to feel simply because of their cultural identity. In addition, as with most societies, talking about sex and sexual abuse is sensitive and regarded as taboo in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Recent negative experiences with welfare agencies, police and the justice system have added to the historical experiences of the Stolen Generations. As a result, survivors were often fearful of engaging with institutions. Survivors had few reasons to trust institutions that in the past have condoned the abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The themes described in this chapter reflect what survivors who participated in private sessions chose to tell the Commissioners. Every effort has been made to accurately reflect the stories and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors.

As noted earlier, the Royal Commission did not use a structured approach in its private sessions and Commissioners encouraged survivors to tell their stories in their own way. Some survivors described their experiences of child sexual abuse and its impacts on their lives in great detail during their private session. For a range of reasons, others provided limited or no detail. As a result, these themes are not drawn from a consistent and comprehensive set of information from every private session.

### 5.1.3 Terminology

#### Collective trauma

In this chapter we refer to both ‘collective trauma’ and ‘intergenerational trauma’.

‘Collective trauma’ (also sometimes referred to as historical trauma), is the ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the life span and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences’.<sup>210</sup> It is the shared, unfolding grief and loss experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>211</sup>

We use the term to refer to the trauma caused by the decimation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations during colonisation and the ongoing effects of this over many generations. This perspective also recognises that attempts to destroy language, culture and lore disrupt social relations and healing practices that are integral to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing.<sup>212</sup> The sexual abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in institutions is part of this experience of collective trauma.

#### Intergenerational trauma

‘Intergenerational trauma’ is when the impacts of childhood sexual abuse are transmitted from an individual survivor to their children or grandchildren. We use this term to refer to the compounding, ‘ripple’ effects of child sexual abuse across generations.

When the concept of intergenerational trauma is used in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Indigenous communities in colonised nations, it refers to the compounded experience of ongoing trauma over many generations.<sup>213</sup>

## ‘Protectionist’ legislation, missions and reserves

From the late 1800s and as late as 1969, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adults were placed on missions or government reserves and in related institutions. The practices of forced removal, placement, restricted movement and control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people began under Aboriginal Protection legislation enacted in each Australian state and territory between 1868 (Victoria) and 1911 (Northern Territory).<sup>214</sup> Children were routinely placed in different institutions than their parents.

The legislative provisions authorising the removal and placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were gradually repealed or expired in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The last state or territory to abolish such legislation – New South Wales – did so by 1969. However, children were likely to be removed up until the 1980s. The term ‘mission’ continues to be used by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in reference to the locations of former missions, reserves and related institutions.

In private sessions, survivors predominantly used the term ‘mission’. They rarely made a distinction between a mission and a related institution when they spoke to Commissioners. However, they did tell us the names of the institutions where they were sexually abused as a child and the time period in which the abuse started. In this chapter, we have used the term mission, consistent with the context and time period in which survivors used it.

The Royal Commission has adopted a broad approach to defining missions and related institutions in operation up until the 1970s, based on the institutions named by survivors during private sessions and extensive research. This research involved a review of the relevant legislation, government and religious organisation governance information and institution records.<sup>215</sup> Examples of the types of institutions we have classified as missions or related institutions are provided below.

### **Missions and related institutions**

Mission institutions included missions managed by or affiliated with religious organisations, government-run missions, government reserves, agricultural stations and settlements, as well as the mission schools, churches and dormitories that lay within or adjacent to their boundaries. State and territory governments were responsible for the management and day-to-day operation of mission institutions within their jurisdiction, consistent with the relevant placement and control legislation. For the majority of mission institutions identified by survivors during private sessions, state and territory governments retained management oversight but had delegated responsibility for day-to-day operations to religious institutions.

### Other institutions used to place children under protectionist legislation

Institutions where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed under protectionist legislation included not only missions and reserves, or the institutions with a direct link to the mission. They also included a more diverse group of institutions that were not always exclusive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as reformatories, orphanages, homes, hostels, schools, training centres, reception centres, work placements and foster care.

## 5.2 Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

---

Of the 6,875 survivors and/or their family and friends who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017 to share their experiences of child sexual abuse in Australian institutions, 985 (14.3 per cent) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Of the 985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions:

- almost half (45.4 per cent) were female
- over half (54.9 per cent) were aged 50 or over when they attended a private session
- 8.0 per cent were under the age of 30
- most (79.8 per cent) said they were sexually abused before 1990
- 4.8 per cent said they were a person with disability at the time of the abuse.

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions told Commissioners they were abused during the period of ‘protectionist’ legislation, before about 1970. A substantial minority said they were abused in later years.

The average age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions was 50.3 years. Males were slightly younger than females (48.2 years compared with 52.7 years, respectively).

Further information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who participated in private sessions is provided at Appendix P.

## 5.3 Experiences of abuse

---

During private sessions, survivors chose what they wanted to share with Commissioners. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors did talk about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced as children. They told Commissioners what happened to them, the institutions where it happened and who sexually abused them.

This section reports quantitative information taking into account the varying numbers of survivors who provided information about the different types of abuse they experienced.<sup>216</sup>

### 5.3.1 Nature of the abuse

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors were often young children when the sexual abuse started. Most of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (78.9 per cent) provided Commissioners with details about their age when they were first sexually abused. Of those, almost one out of 10 (7.9 per cent) indicated they were under the age of five and 45.8 per cent indicated they were under 10. The average age when they were first sexually abused was 9.6 years. Females (9.4 years) were slightly younger than males (9.8 years).

Of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who talked to Commissioners about the frequency and duration of the child sexual abuse:

- most (87.1 per cent) said they experienced multiple episodes of sexual abuse
- more than one-third (36.1 per cent) said they were sexually abused for between two and five years
- almost one-fifth (17.7 per cent) said they were sexually abused for over five years.

Of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who talked to Commissioners about the types of sexual abuse they experienced (noting that many experienced multiple episodes and types of sexual abuse):

- about two-thirds (67.5 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact abuse, such as being sexually touched or made to touch the perpetrator's body
- 62.8 per cent described experiences of child sexual abuse involving penetration (for example, penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, another body part or an object)
- over one-quarter (26.8 per cent) described experiences where their privacy was violated, such as being forced to undress in front of someone or being watched while showering

- 12.8 per cent described experiences consistent with being groomed for sexual contact (for example, behaviours that manipulate and control the child, their families and other support networks, or institutions, with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence, and avoiding discovery of the sexual abuse)
- almost one in 10 (9.2 per cent) described experiences consistent with being exposed to sexual acts and material (for example, having sexual acts performed in front of them, having genitals exposed to them, or being shown pornographic material)
- 2.8 per cent described experiences consistent with child sexual exploitation (that is, being coerced or manipulated into participating in sexual activity in return for something such as food, accommodation, clothing, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money, or an incentive such as love, affection or safety).

Two in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (66.5 per cent) also said they experienced other forms of abuse in the lead up to, during and/or after the child sexual abuse. Among these survivors, 78.8 per cent said they experienced physical abuse, such as hitting, slapping, punching and kicking. More than three-quarters (77.7 per cent) described experiencing emotional abuse, such as use of fear, intimidation, bullying and humiliation. Almost one-quarter (24.7 per cent) described experiences of neglect, and 16.8 per cent said they were forced into child labour. Almost one in five (18.6 per cent) witnessed the abuse of others.

## Never feeling safe, and being exploited

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners they seldom felt safe in institutions. Some said that they were forcibly removed as young children and spent much of their childhood in one or two institutions.<sup>217</sup> Others recounted that they had spent years in many different institutions and often gave accounts of multiple episodes of abuse by different perpetrators. Many of these survivors described abuse involving coercion, cruelty and powerlessness.

Survivors who said they had been separated from their families as children often told Commissioners that they rarely felt safe in large historical residential institutions, foster homes and work placements. Some survivors who had been cycled through multiple institutions described a sense of relief when they were placed with a family that cared for them or an adult who appeared interested in looking out for them. For some survivors, relief was short lived when perpetrators in foster families and others connected to the placements took advantage of their trust and loyalty.

'Agnes' told the Commissioner she was sent to work as a domestic at a sheep and cattle station when she was 15.<sup>218</sup> She said some people she worked for were racist, and many treated her badly. 'Agnes' said on one station she was so frightened she ran away. She was then returned to the mission by the police and punished.



Some survivors told Commissioners that their housing and accommodation security was dependent upon putting up with and keeping quiet about the sexual abuse.<sup>218</sup> 'Alec Robert' said he moved to a family group home after experiencing abuse in a large Catholic boys' institution.<sup>219</sup> He told the Commissioner that at first, the house parents were 'a breath of fresh air'. Then 'Alec Robert' said the house father started being affectionate in a 'sick kind of way' and abused him and other boys in the group home. 'Alec Robert' said he had opportunities to report the abuse but never did. He said he did not like the abuse, but the group home was finally a place where he otherwise felt safe and cared for. In order not to jeopardise this, he chose to keep silent:

Everything I'd been looking for, that I'd missed as a child, you know, [this home] gave you. It was like 'who's gonna believe me?' So you just put up with it, hope it didn't happen, try to push him away.<sup>220</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often recounted how the alleged perpetrators took advantage of their positions of authority supervising children in institutions. Survivors who had spent time in youth detention described the power relationships between them and the perpetrator. In the 1980s, 'Deb' was in a government-run youth detention centre where 'you didn't breathe without asking'.<sup>221</sup> She said the warden, when he was doing his rounds, would produce cigarettes from the handle of his torch and give them to her and other girls in the dormitory. 'Then he'd come around a couple of hours later and you'd have to earn your cigarettes.' 'Deb' told the Commissioner the girls would be taken somewhere private within the institution and forced to perform oral sex.<sup>222</sup>

## Violence, neglect and child labour

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often told Commissioners that their childhoods were marked by physical violence, child labour and neglect. Many survivors said they witnessed the sexual, physical and emotional abuse of other children. These reports were especially common among survivors who spent some or all of their childhood on a mission, reserve or related institution. Survivors often said that authorities, co-workers and other institutional staff disregarded the wellbeing of the victim, and allowed or facilitated the child sexual abuse.

Many survivors told Commissioners they were treated badly and held responsible for being sexually abused. They felt they were not believed when they disclosed the abuse because people in authority and in the community held racist attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Meggie' told the Commissioner she was removed from her family as a young child in the 1950s and placed in foster care with an older couple.<sup>223</sup> 'Meggie' said she was put to work cooking and cleaning for them. She told the Commissioner that over the next 10 years, she was repeatedly sexually and physically abused by the foster father. 'Meggie' also said that while living with the older couple she was raped by a group of local boys. 'Meggie' said she told the police, and they 'blamed me' for being raped by the boys 'because I was Aboriginal and I was "looking for it"'.<sup>224</sup>

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners they were used as child labour. This was especially common among survivors who lived in historical residential institutions such as missions, children's homes and orphanages, as well as survivors who lived with non-Indigenous foster families before about 1990. Many of these survivors described the conditions as harsh and cruel, where staff at the institution or the children's carers would punish the children for behaviours that were outside their control, such as wetting the bed. 'Blake William' told the Commissioner he was taken from his family when he was 10 and placed on a mission where he 'used to cry, cry all the time, cry for my mother and father'.<sup>225</sup> He said the clothing provided to the children was completely inadequate – no jumpers, no underwear – and during the winter months they would freeze. 'We had to stand in cow poo, to keep our feet warm.' If they wet the bed, 'Blake William' said they were beaten with a strap and given an icy cold shower. He told the Commissioner he worked hard in the dairy and was raped by one of the Protestant missionaries. Like many survivors in large historical institutions, 'Blake William' said he did not get much schooling and still has trouble reading and writing.<sup>226</sup>

### 5.3.2 The institutions

Over one-quarter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (28.0 per cent) said they were sexually abused in more than one institution. Three quarters (75.0 per cent) said they were abused in out-of-home care. The majority (61.8 per cent) were abused in historical residential institutions, such as a mission or children's home, and a smaller proportion (8.1 per cent) in contemporary out-of-home care, such as foster care or kinship/relative care. Over one in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (15.2 per cent) said they were sexually abused while in youth detention. About one in 10 (10.1 per cent) said they were sexually abused in a day or boarding school. Some were sexually abused while they participated in religious activities (5.4 per cent).

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (46.1 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused in a government-managed institution, while a similar proportion (43.5 per cent) said they were abused in an institution managed by a religious organisation. (Missions and children's homes were managed by governments or religious organisations).

Among those sexually abused in a religious-managed institution, the majority (51.4 per cent) said the abuse occurred in a Catholic-managed institution. Over one in 10 (14.0 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused in an institution managed by the Protestant Churches, and slightly fewer (11.9 per cent) indicated they were abused in an institution affiliated with the Anglican Church. Volume 16, *Religious institutions* discusses in more detail the experience of being abused in a religious institution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors.

### 5.3.3 Adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours

Almost half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (46.5 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused as children by multiple people. Most (92.6 per cent) said they were sexually abused by one or more males, and 15.7 per cent said they were sexually abused by one or more females.

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (71.2 per cent) told Commissioners they knew the approximate age of the person or persons who sexually abused them. Among this group, three quarters (75.6 per cent) said they were sexually abused by an adult aged 18 years or older and 36.4 per cent indicated they were sexually abused by a child.

Most adult perpetrators held some form of authority over the victim within the institution where the sexual abuse occurred. Some held multiple roles within an institution (for example, teacher and priest). In general, the Royal Commission recorded only the 'primary' role (for example, teacher rather than priest if the victim was abused in a school).

Of the 985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions (noting that many were sexually abused by more than one person), 94 per cent provided information about the role of the perpetrator. Of those:

- almost one-quarter (23.3 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a foster carer
- almost one in five (19.4 per cent) said they were abused by a residential care worker
- 17.9 per cent said they were sexually abused by a person in religious ministry (such as a minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, Salvation Army officer, church elder, religious brother or sister and any other person recognised as a spiritual leader in a religious institution)
- just over one in 10 (10.9 per cent) described being sexually abused by custodial staff, usually associated with youth detention
- 7.2 per cent said they were sexually abused by a teacher
- 6.6 per cent said they were abused by a dormitory or house master.

#### Adult perpetrators

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described perpetrators in residential institutions, particularly out-of-home care and youth detention. Many were in positions of authority and took advantage of children who were without adult support and protection.

Some survivors believed that perpetrators created opportunities to abuse them by accessing their records and taking advantage of the information. 'Kieren' was 17 when he went to study at a college located many kilometres from the mission where he lived in the 1960s.<sup>227</sup> He told the Commissioner that the church's Indigenous Liaison Officer on the mission approached him as he was boarding the bus to the college and offered him a lift. 'Kieren' said he thought the Officer, 'must have saw my records and worked out where I was going. He probably premeditated what he done'. 'Kieren' told the Commissioner he had heard the rumours about the Officer, but his better judgment was shouted down by the prospect of a free ride in a 'flash' car and the Officer's friendliness. 'Kieren' told the Commissioner he was groomed by the perpetrator: 'He was that sort of fella. Happy go-lucky, sort of jokey. He knew how to joke with a blackfella'. It was a long journey so 'Kieren' said he and the man stopped in a small town where they spent the night together in a caravan:

We had a horrible night in the caravan. It was horrible. He more or less raped me. I was hopeless. I was a young fella. I was big enough to belt him but I just couldn't do it. I was just jammed in that sort of position. He just had it on me. Crushed me. Crushed my spirit.<sup>228</sup>

'Kieren' told the Commissioner he was upset by the inaction of people outside the community who knew what was happening and did not protect him. 'The sad fact too: the people we were with, they knew what he was like. They didn't protect me. I went to theirs next morning for breakfast and they couldn't look at me. They knew.'<sup>229</sup>

As previously indicated, the large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (92.6 per cent) said they were sexually abused by males. Many survivors who as children were placed in foster care, work placements and children's homes told Commissioners that the adults around them were cruel. 'Shekinah' said 'Mrs Barratt', the foster mother, 'tried to burn my hand on the stove, threw the jug of water on me ... She'd wrench me round by my hair, kick me down the stairs'.<sup>230</sup> She explained that the foster father, 'Mr Barratt' sexually abused her and one day 'Mrs Barratt' walked in on the abuse. Initially 'Mrs Barratt' was angry, but quickly blamed 'Shekinah', calling her 'a tart' and 'a little slut' and saying that 'Shekinah' had 'asked for it. 'Shekinah' ran away at age 14.

## Children with harmful sexual behaviours

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often described being abused by other children. Most commonly, this sexual abuse occurred in historical residential institutions and foster care. Some said they were abused by other children at school. Female survivors who were placed with foster families often said that they were abused by the biological children of their foster parents. Boyfriends of cousins, nephews and other foster siblings were also mentioned. Many survivors said that adults within these settings knew about the sexual abuse and did nothing to stop it.

'Hazel' and her siblings lived on a mission while her parents were sent away to work. Her mother worked on stations nearby and her father was 'sent out to do ringbarking'.<sup>231</sup> 'Hazel' said she and her sister were placed with a non-Indigenous family who lived nearby, where she was abused by the adult male who lived there. From there, 'Hazel' said she was placed with a non-Indigenous foster family in Melbourne where two of the biological sons, 'Robert' and 'Steven', raped her repeatedly.

'Hazel' told the Commissioner that when she lived with the foster family, she had to get up early every day to do the household chores. She remembers one morning when 'Mr and Mrs Kelly' were out shopping:

I was on my knees on the floor, polishing the lino and then 'Robert' [one of the biological sons] just grabbed me from behind and dragged me outside the house, round the side of the house and then up to his room which was attached to the house. That's where he assaulted me there. And it was sexual intercourse.<sup>232</sup>

Like other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, 'Hazel' described how she had come to expect that she would be sexually abused because of her Aboriginality:

I thought it was a duty, because my mother had gone through the same sort of thing. And I tell you, if we didn't do it, or go to their rooms or whatever the case, there was hell to pay the next day. They told me: 'You tell Mum and Dad, they won't believe you. We're their children and you're just black kids'.<sup>233</sup>

'Hazel' told the Commissioner the foster mother was protective of her biological sons responsible for the child sexual abuse. As a result of the abuse, 'Hazel' said she became pregnant and miscarried at 13. She said 'Mrs Kelly' called the doctor, and then 'it was all just, "whisper, whisper, hush, hush" and nothing was said'.<sup>234</sup>

### 5.3.4 How children tried to avoid abuse and protect each other

Many survivors told Commissioners of strategies they used to avoid or escape from perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Many also described the actions they took to protect others. In situations where they were living near brothers, sisters or cousins, older children tried to protect their young siblings and relatives. Other survivors said they tried to run away, though often the institution's geographical isolation and the harsh weather conditions made this difficult.

## Protecting each other

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often told Commissioners they were separated from their siblings when they were placed into historical residential and contemporary out-of-home care institutions. Some said they were separated from siblings of the opposite sex and placed in institutions with siblings of the same sex. Many of these survivors described the ways in which they had tried to protect their siblings from child sexual abuse. 'Jody' described herself as having a tough streak from a very young age.<sup>235</sup> She told the Commissioner she was living on a mission in the 1960s and 1970s when she was sexually abused by other children. She said: 'The people involved felt that they had a sense of right or entitlement or capacity to do what they did ... that I was invisible, that I was worthless'. 'Jody' told the Commissioner she felt a sense of responsibility for her young siblings and described the time she had been punished for something her sisters did:

I was responsible for them because I was the older sister. I was given a hiding. I was okay with the hiding. I was being responsible for my sisters. The person giving the hiding wanted to ensure that I was hurt. To cry. And I refused to cry. I don't know where that came from.<sup>236</sup>

Several survivors who lived in boys-only institutions told Commissioners their older brothers protected them against abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours. 'Jonas' said that his older brother 'Gordon' lived in a different dormitory but looked after him.<sup>237</sup> 'Jonas' said he saw other boys get bullied and sexually abused by boys in the institution but he felt protected because his brother was looking out for him:

He always told me what to do and I always listened to him. He always told me to make sure I did my chores and did not argue. I believe he protected me from bullies and older boys. Older boys sexually assaulted younger boys in the home and I needed to be watching over my shoulder in case someone tried to assault me. I think because my brother was there he did his best to make sure it did not happen to me.<sup>238</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often described the concern they felt for their siblings and would try to stay with them even though they paid a high personal price. Many survivors told Commissioners about the physical and sexual violence they experienced in out-of-home care, but said that leaving the home was not an option if it meant being separated from a sibling. 'Shekinah' was living in foster care in the 1990s.<sup>239</sup> She told the Commissioner that her foster family was 'cruel'. 'Shekinah' said that she was regularly physically abused by both foster parents, and that when she was 10, the school counsellor noticed bruising on her legs. The counsellor reported the bruising to her caseworker, and 'Shekinah' said she was taken out of her foster home. Despite the violence, 'Shekinah' told the Commissioner that she asked to be returned to the home because she did not want to be away from her younger sister. 'Shekinah' said that it was on her return that her foster father started sexually abusing her, with the abuse lasting four years. 'Shekinah' told the Commissioner she ran away when she was 14 and lived in refuges with her sister until she was 18.<sup>240</sup>

## Hiding and running

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors commonly told stories of running away over very long distances to find safer places to live and escape physical and sexual abuse. Many said they ran away in an attempt to find family they had been separated from. Some survivors ran away from an institution with family or with friends. Many survivors told Commissioners stories of running away, being caught and then returned. 'Coral' told the Commissioner she was placed in a series of foster homes with her sister from when she was five.<sup>241</sup> 'Coral' said that when she was nine or 10, her foster father started abusing her. She said, 'We ran away because of what was happening there. All I remember is chucking my sister over a high fence and running'. 'Coral' said she and her sister were caught and returned to the foster home. She said that no one asked why they had run away. 'They just thought we was rebelling and wanted to be with our family.'<sup>242</sup>

Survivors who ran away were not always returned to their placement and some told stories of fending for themselves on the street or living on the edges of extended family. Some slept rough or wherever they found a bed. 'Tansy' told the Commissioner that after many different violent and sometimes racist foster homes, she was placed in kinship care where she was sexually abused by her cousin's boyfriend and an uncle.<sup>243</sup> She said she ran away after disclosing the abuse and was bullied into withdrawing her complaint. 'My aunties said if I didn't it would cause a family feud and I'd get a hiding.' A year or so later, 'Tansy' said she began living on the streets, using drugs and self-harming. Despite pressure from the Department of Child Protection (DCP), 'Tansy' said that she preferred living on the street to going back to the abuse:

DCP kept telling me to go back to my auntie – [I said] 'I'm not going back there to be abused again' – when I told them about my cousin's boyfriend messing around with me all the time ... they didn't believe me.<sup>244</sup>

Other survivors described strategies they used to avoid sexual abuse when they were unable to run away, or when running away did not stop the abuse. Many said they were unable to avoid perpetrators who appeared to have easy access to children, and some described hiding to avoid being abused. 'Sherrill' told the Commissioner she lived in a dormitory on an Anglican-run mission in a remote area where she frequently got 'the strap' – a piece of tyre cut a 'half-inch thick'.<sup>245</sup> When the women missionaries were having a prayer meeting, 'Sherrill' said the missionaries sons and their sons' friends would pull the louvres out of the dormitory windows and 'rape whatever girl they wanted'. 'Sherrill' told the Commissioner she ran away from the mission several times, once running 30 miles (more than 48 kilometres) in the dark alone, but that each time she was picked up by police and returned to the mission. 'Sherrill' said she took to sleeping in a wardrobe to try to avoid the rapists.<sup>246</sup>

## 5.4 Circumstances at the time of abuse

---

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners they had been forcibly removed from their families. They were ‘part of the Stolen Generations’ and described lives marked by racism, hardship, poverty, violence and abuse, and the impacts of collective and intergenerational trauma. They described how they, their families and their communities carry the ongoing legacy of being forcibly removed from their land, their family and their culture. Many spoke about the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples more broadly, describing the sexual abuse as just one of the many forms of violence inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities since colonisation.

The following section describes the social, cultural and institutional contexts surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors’ stories of sexual abuse, as well as common themes in their family circumstances. Where necessary and relevant, the themes have been discussed separately according to the three time periods: prior to 1970, 1970 to 1989, and after 1990. These time periods broadly reflect changes in the provision of out-of-home care and are especially relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors because many described being abused in large residential institutions.

### 5.4.1 Social and cultural context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors of child sexual abuse who attended private sessions described how historical and contemporary attitudes have impacted on and shaped their lives. This section describes some of the common social and cultural contexts they outlined: racism, discrimination and intergenerational trauma. This is followed by specific examples that highlight the differences in survivor experiences within each time frame.

#### Racism and discrimination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often talked about the racism and discrimination they experienced within the wider community and within institutions. Some made the link between these experiences and their vulnerability to abuse. Older survivors tended to describe overt racism such as being taunted with racist names, being called ‘coons’ and ‘boongs’.<sup>247</sup> Others said they were punished for mixing with white children, such as for sitting next to a white child while having lunch at school. Sometimes, these racist practices led to children disengaging from school and the broader community.



‘Judith’ said she was from a small country town in New South Wales and experienced a lot of ‘racism and ridicule’ at school for being Aboriginal.<sup>248</sup> She said, ‘school wasn’t that happy a place, we didn’t go to school as much as we could’. She told the Commissioner that when she was 12 she was deemed by authorities to be ‘in moral danger’ because she went to parties with her older sister. ‘Judith’ told the Commissioner that the authorities sent her to a residential training school in Sydney, while her siblings stayed with their mother. ‘Judith’ said that she was repeatedly physically and sexually abused by the school’s superintendent.<sup>249</sup>

Survivors of more recent abuse often described experiencing discrimination in less obvious ways, such as by teachers and other students avoiding them at school or not offering the same opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as they did to non-Indigenous children. Some survivors believed this had made them easy targets for perpetrators looking for socially isolated children.

‘Lynda’ told the Commissioner that both her parents placed a high value on education as they had not had the opportunity for traditional or institutional education.<sup>250</sup> Being Aboriginal, ‘Lynda’ said her family experienced racism and discrimination and she was used to teachers not taking any interest in her. ‘Lynda’ said she was vulnerable to being groomed by a new teacher at school who told her she was smart and could ‘go places’, and that ‘the world was my oyster’. ‘Lynda’ said the teacher abused her, and afterwards she stopped caring about her life and future and dropped out of school.<sup>251</sup>

Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors believed being black prevented anyone from listening to them. They often said they were used to no one listening to Aboriginal people’s voices and expected no one would care they were being sexually abused. ‘Dee’ told the Commissioner she was taken from her mother as a baby and placed in a children’s home run by Catholic nuns.<sup>252</sup> On one of her weekend visits to see her mother, ‘Dee’ said she was raped by a man who was also visiting. ‘Dee’ was nine years old at the time. She told the Commissioner she had not reported the abuse to police, the state, or the Catholic Church. She thinks talking to them ‘goes in one ear and out the other, because I’m black ... If you’re white, you’re right’.<sup>253</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors talked about a social context in which they were considered to be inferior, and how this made them particularly vulnerable to institutional child sexual abuse. ‘Rainey’ told the Commissioner she was sent to work as a housemaid on a remote sheep station.<sup>254</sup> She explained that the sheep station boss and other men would come to her quarters at night and rape her. ‘Rainey’ said the police raped her when she went to report the abuse. ‘Rainey’ said the assaults by men at the sheep station continued, and then included the driver of the mail van. She said, ‘What, were you supposed to be, just a plaything? What was it, that every white man thought he could have you any time he wanted?’<sup>255</sup>

## Intergenerational trauma

As described earlier, since colonisation and through to the 1950s and 1960s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their parents and communities. From 1869 government policies removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their land. These laws, practices and policies, and their effects, are outlined in Volume 2, *Nature and cause*, and have been comprehensively documented in the reports of previous inquiries, such as the *Bringing them home* report, and will not be discussed in this volume.<sup>256</sup>

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors talked to Commissioners about being part of the Stolen Generations. They described the ongoing trauma they felt – not only from their own forced removal from family, culture and land, but also from the forced removal of their siblings, parents and extended family, and in some cases, the forced removal of their own children. For the majority of survivors, the trauma they experienced as a result of child sexual abuse could not be separated from the intergenerational trauma associated with child removal. Furthermore, child removal policies had placed children in danger and made them vulnerable to sexual abuse in institutions. Understanding child sexual abuse within the broader context of child removal is essential to understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors' experiences of sexual abuse and its ongoing impacts on their lives.

Many survivors said that the trauma of being removed compounded by the additional trauma of child sexual abuse has had ongoing and intergenerational effects. Many survivors described mourning the loss of connection to their culture. Younger survivors told Commissioners how intergenerational trauma manifested as family problems of poverty or violence that led to them being placed into foster or kinship care. 'Coral' told the Commissioner that her mother was 15 when she had her. Her mother was not able to properly care for her or her younger sister due to a drug addiction.<sup>257</sup> 'Coral' said that when she was five, she was placed in multiple short-term foster homes, and when she was nine or 10, she was sexually abused by a foster father. 'Coral' told the Commissioner her mother was a member of the 'Lost Generation' – children who were taken and lost to their families and culture. 'Coral's' story of her experiences, and that of her family, was a very common one. The trauma of child removal and child sexual abuse continues to be experienced and transmitted through the generations. 'Coral' told the Commissioner:

When kids are taken, they miss their family. They're the only ones they know and feel loved by ... It's been happening in my family for years. My nan and her sisters was Lost Generation and mum was and now us.<sup>258</sup>

## Survivor accounts: Stolen Generations and cycles of intergenerational trauma, ‘protectionist’ and assimilationist laws.

Many survivors who said their parents and grandparents were taken from their families under policies of child removal described the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma. Survivors often described how their families had been affected by multiple traumas, including the systemic failure to protect children in out-of-home care. ‘Raquel’s’ story, which follows, highlights some of the common experiences described by survivors.<sup>259</sup> Her account described how:

- parents’ childhood trauma impacted on family relationships and this intergenerational trauma contributed to many children being ‘taken into care’<sup>260</sup>
- children experienced instability in care and were placed in multiple homes. Conditions were often harsh and children were sexually abused by foster family members
- children experienced homelessness and many were placed in youth detention after running away
- survivors found strength in their relationships with family and friends, helping others and connecting to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture.

### **‘Raquel’s’ story of intergenerational trauma**

‘Raquel’ said her mother was a member of the Stolen Generations and her ‘worst fear was us going away. Going through the same’. ‘Raquel’ said her mother suffered after being taken from her family and raised in an institution as a young child, and this affected her behaviour as a parent. ‘Raquel’ said that in the 1980s when she was 12, she and her siblings were removed from their mother because of her drinking:

My mum, when she was still struggling for her own identity, the heartache and the hatred she had for the government, for the Stolen Generation ... And that’s like a bad disease, it can spread among the children. And leaving a child in a home after that, it just grows to a heart of stone.

‘Raquel’ said she and her siblings were removed and placed in a Catholic Aboriginal children’s home. They lived with non-Indigenous families in cottages. Like many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors in out-of-home care, she was subjected to harsh treatment by the foster family. ‘Raquel’ described them as ‘cruel pigs’. She said she was whipped with a bamboo stick and experienced other physical and emotional abuse. ‘The son would piss on me and they would make us drink piss.’ She witnessed ‘a lot of things’ and ‘was too scared to tell anyone, and you just had nowhere to go’.

'Raquel' told the Commissioner she experienced multiple incidents of mistreatment and child sexual abuse:

When I was locked in the cupboard [by the houseparents] the big boy would sometimes get in the cupboard with me and molest me. This went on for months, and I would take off to try escape the place and get away from them all.

When she was 15, 'Raquel' was placed in a youth detention centre where she was sexually abused by another young person. She believed the workers at the centre knew what was happening but turned a 'blind eye'. 'They were meant to check on us while we were in the home and they did bloody nothing.'

'Raquel' spent over 20 years homeless and has blocked out a lot of her life. She said she at times used substances to cope, though she is now able to manage this. She described the importance of connections to family and friends in her life, and remains close to a valuable friend who was also abused. 'We support each other because she was also abused in another home. We have been "sisters" for 30 years and we are also strong activists against child abuse.'

Despite this, 'Raquel' has problems with trust and relationships. She told the Commissioner she had chosen not to become a parent because she was scared about what would happen to the child if she was to 'leave this world'. She is an 'aunty-mum' and 'nanna' to her nieces and nephews and tries to be the kind of adult she needed when she was small.

'Raquel' advocated for more services and support for survivors of child sexual abuse and told the Commissioner that she believes more can be done for the healing process:

A child can hate, hate, hate, but when they're 60 and still hating, there's a lot of reasons for us to move on them actions, to do something. We've had plenty of time to do it, the government had plenty of time to do it.

She now has a counselling qualification and has learned from her 'experience of counsellors who failed' her. 'Raquel' likes helping others:

I get the love and admiration from counselling children and adults who have the same lived experience as I have. It helps me, and I get a better understanding of problem-solving what abuse is today.<sup>261</sup>

## ‘Taken into care’: Protectionism’ and assimilation, social context before 1970

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors were removed from their families and ‘taken into care’ under policies of ‘protection’ and assimilation.<sup>262</sup> Many talked to Commissioners about the trauma this had caused them and their parents and in many cases, their children and their children’s children. Many survivors did not understand why they had been removed from loving, supportive families and culture and placed into institutions that showed no care for children. ‘Jonas’ was one of many survivors who told the Commissioner he had been taken from his family in the 1960s:

I don’t know why I got taken away, ‘cause I’d been going to school every day – clean clothes, home-packed lunch. We all helped one another in my family ... I knew about my Aboriginal culture as I was taught by my aunties and uncles who were my elders. Before I was taken I knew where I was from and who I was and I had an identity.<sup>263</sup>

‘Jonas’ wondered what might have happened had he not been removed from his family, and reflected on the consequences of being institutionalised as a child:

I still do not know why I was taken and why I deserved to be treated this way. I was treated poorly and I was not prepared for coping with society ... For so long in my life I have felt like nobody. I have had to tell myself over and over again that I am a good person, although it is hard because I do not believe it. I never wanted to burden anyone with my problems because that was how I was raised in the homes ... I wonder what my life would have been like if I had grown up with my mother and siblings. Would I be a more confident and outgoing man now?<sup>264</sup>

Other survivors talked about how they were removed when their family circumstances came to the attention of authorities. ‘Bernard’ was born in the early 1960s.<sup>265</sup> He told the Commissioner that after his parents split up, his family fell apart. ‘Bernard’ and his siblings looked after themselves until they were arrested and charged with neglect. ‘It was a crime that we committed upon ourselves by hanging round together, neglected.’ ‘Bernard’ was six years old at the time. Other survivors told Commissioners that they grew up in safe and supportive families and described their parents as good and hardworking people. Forced child removal undermined the strengths of parents, families and communities.

Many survivors told Commissioners that their memories of being removed were inconsistent with official records. Survivors often described these official accounts as incorrect or found they had been ‘blackened out’. ‘Vernon’ said he was four years old in the late 1950s, when he and his siblings were removed from the rest of the family.<sup>266</sup> ‘Vernon’ told the Commissioner that his older brother remembers their mother ‘screaming and crying’ when the authorities took her children, ripping them out of her arms. ‘Vernon’ said the documents stated that his parents were ‘unfit’ but ‘Vernon’ told us ‘there was no evidence to prove it’.<sup>267</sup> There was mention of his parents having issues with alcohol, which ‘Vernon’ said he found difficult to believe as alcohol was not allowed on the Aboriginal reserve where they lived. ‘Vernon’ said he never saw his parents again during his time in state institutions.<sup>268</sup>

## Social context in the 1970s and 1980s

Following a referendum held in 1967, Australia's Constitution was amended to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the national population census, and to give federal parliament the power to make laws in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>269</sup> Prior to the referendum, making such laws was the responsibility of individual states and territories and there was little consistency between them. For example, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person could own property in some states and territories but not in others. It was widely believed that giving federal parliament the power to legislate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was in their best interests and would lead to better conditions over time. However, the experiences that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described to Commissioners suggest that, during this period, the legacy of previous policies and laws denying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people basic rights and respect as human beings remained.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who were institutionalised during the 1970s and 1980s said they felt disconnected from their family, land and culture. They found dominant white culture foreign, and as a result of being removed and denied access to their cultural heritage, did not understand or identify with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who experienced multiple placements with non-Indigenous families found it especially difficult to stay connected to culture.<sup>270</sup> 'Skye' told the Commissioner she was placed in foster care in the 1980s.<sup>271</sup> She was just two years old. She said her non-Indigenous foster father and mother were physically abusive and that the foster grandfather sexually abused her 'every time he babysat me'. 'Skye' was moved through several placements and said she was sexually abused by several men including her stepfather and uncle. She spoke to the Commissioner about the ongoing impacts of her unsettled childhood and the abuse she experienced. Although she identifies as Aboriginal, 'Skye' said she had no real connection to the Aboriginal community, and does not have any family relationships. She said she is unable to trust people and has had a number of violent partners.<sup>272</sup>

Some survivors who lived in foster care but were sexually abused outside of the placement, such as at school or church, described their foster families as kind and well-intentioned, but still felt disconnected being away from their family and culture. These survivors said they keenly felt their differences – often because they were the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in the neighbourhood. 'Keenan' told the Commissioner he was fostered by a 'nice white family' when he was five years old in the mid-1980s.<sup>273</sup> He said he loved and admired this couple and was happy when they became his adoptive parents. But 'Keenan' said he felt out of place in the white neighbourhood. 'I was worried about what people would think when my family is white and I was black.'<sup>274</sup>

## Social context after 1990

Younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who attended private sessions were more likely to describe experiences in foster and kinship care than life on a mission, reserve or large residential institution. Many were placed with non-Indigenous families and some with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and carers.

Some survivors told Commissioners that their parents tried to warn child protection authorities about placing children with the wrong kin, but they were ignored. 'Gina' told the Commissioner she had intellectual disability and was admitted into the care of Queensland's Department of Family Services as a baby.<sup>275</sup> When she was eight, 'Gina' said she was placed with her aunt and uncle. 'Gina' told the Commissioner that prior to the placement, her father warned the department there was 'bad tribal blood' between their families and that 'Gina' should be placed elsewhere. Her father's concerns were ignored, and 'Gina' said she was physically abused by her foster parents and sexually abused by a friend of her uncle's and her older cousin, among others.<sup>276</sup>

### 5.4.2 Institutional context

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (61.8 per cent) described child sexual abuse that occurred in an historical residential institution, including missions, reserves and related institutions that were either run by governments or run by religious organisations. Many survivors who were sexually abused in these institutions described experiences marked by multiple and compounded traumas. Survivors who were abused more recently in out-of-home care institutions more commonly described living in foster and kinship care. Child sexual abuse in historical residential institutions is discussed in more detail in Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*. In Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care*, further information can be found about child sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, regardless of when they first experienced sexual abuse, described situations where institutions had not protected the children in their care. Many survivors felt that authorities were reluctant to intervene when the situation was too hard or too difficult to solve. In many such cases, survivors felt that children were left to fend for themselves.

'Allannah' told the Commissioner that in the mid-1980s she and her cousin were taken from their mothers when they were young.<sup>277</sup> They lived with their aunty, 'in tin shacks', until 'Allannah' said she was raped at the age of five. 'Allannah' said she was then made a ward of the state and placed into foster care, where a 'Christian bloke', a male friend of the foster family sexually abused her. 'Allannah' said she and her cousin ran away to their home town and when the welfare workers came to get them, one of their uncles refused to let them go. Without a home, 'Allannah' told the Commissioner they stayed around the area to be near their extended family but felt deserted by the authorities:

DOCS [Department of Community Services] just left us. Never came back to see who was caring for us or anything. It wasn't just me, it was my sister, me, my other cousin, my other little cousin – and he got murdered. Because they never checked up on us. He'd be alive too today if they'd have done their job properly. He would have been 10 years old [when he died], I reckon.<sup>278</sup>

## Institutional context before 1970

The large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who told us they were sexually abused prior to 1970 said the abuse took place on a mission, reserve or related institution. Some said they were abused in smaller, family-based institutional contexts such as group cottages and foster care. Many survivors described little or no effective oversight of management practices. Like other survivors from historical residential institutions – such as Former Child Migrants and the Forgotten Australians – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners these institutions were often physically violent places with emotionally abusive routines. Children were often left unsupervised, making them vulnerable to sexual, physical and emotional abuse by adult staff and children with harmful sexual behaviours.

Some survivors told Commissioners about institutional routines and rituals that were dehumanising and humiliating, and that undermined their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identities and cultures. Several survivors from one government-managed boys' home described the ritual that staff adopted when new boys were admitted into their care. These survivors said the boys were given a number, and their identity was attached to that number. Staff and other students were forced to call students by the number rather than their name. 'Jonas' said 'It felt terrible to be called a number. I was just a number and nothing else ... it made me feel like less of a person'.<sup>279</sup> Another survivor from the same institution, 'Ellis Owen', recalled that he was ordered to forget his family: 'Your family is gone now, they don't want you anymore. Look at your clothes there's a number on it. That's you'.<sup>280</sup>



Many survivors described institutions where violence was normalised. These survivors often said that sexual abuse was part of a broader institutional culture of abuse in which sexual, physical and emotional violence between staff and children, and among children, was either condoned or ignored. These survivors often told Commissioners they were caned or tied up as punishment. Others described institutional routines and practices where staff forced children to fight each other. Some described being sent ‘down the line’ – a particularly cruel punishment where the victim was continually punched as they were made to walk between two lines of boys. Boys who refused to take part in the punching then had to go ‘down the line’ themselves.<sup>281</sup>

Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described being forced to work while children. This was especially common among ‘mission kids’, and sometimes among survivors who lived with foster families.<sup>282</sup> Survivors told Commissioners they milked cows, picked olives, scrubbed floors, worked in hospitals and looked after cattle. Many described being hungry and cold, and some said they fed themselves with scraps from the ‘chook [chicken] pen’.<sup>283</sup> Many survivors who lived under these conditions as children understood that the adults around them did not care about their wellbeing. Many said they thought no one would care if they disclosed the abuse, a belief that was often borne out for those who did disclose.

As children, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors lived on missions, reserves or related institutions managed by governments or religious organisations. Many of these institutions were located in remote areas. Survivors told Commissioners that the remote locations often meant that there was little outside supervision or oversight by the relevant authorities. It also meant that children were isolated from their families and culture. Survivors told Commissioners that groups of unrelated children were often placed together without any consideration of kinship or family relationships, and that speaking their own language and following their own cultural traditions was strictly forbidden.

‘Carl’ told the Commissioner he was nine when he was ‘stolen’ from his parents and ‘arrested’ by the police and a ‘native welfare officer’.<sup>284</sup> He said his new life on the mission was ‘exciting at first’ – being surrounded by so many different Aboriginal kids. ‘Not all of them were from my country – it was a mixed bag.’ However, he also told the Commissioner it was a terrible shock. ‘Carl’ said he had grown up eating bush food and had not lived in a house. ‘I lived in the bush with my mum and dad, all my life with them. It was a totally different life.’ ‘Carl’ also explained that it became harder and harder for the children to remember their kinship rules and cultural traditions because on the mission:

each time you spoke your language you were flogged. Any time you did something cultural; meaningful for yourself – you were flogged ... It seemed to me that we had a terrible lot of beltings and floggings ... They were brutal. Very brutal.<sup>285</sup>

## Survivor accounts: Mission life was cruel and unjust, destroying families and culture

Commissioners were told that living conditions were cruel and hard for children living on missions. Survivors said that as children they were treated violently, and that a culture of violence was normalised in the institutions. Many said they had been well cared for and connected to family and culture prior to removal. 'Merle's' story, which follows, captures some of the common elements described by many survivors who were sexually abused in these contexts.<sup>286</sup>

### **'Merle's' story**

'Merle' told the Commissioner she 'had a wonderful childhood until the age of seven', when she was taken from her grandmother and placed in an orphanage:

And going into the orphanage, I was lost. I had no family. None of us knew family, nothing.

In the orphanage we were not allowed to mix with family, so family was taken away from us. Like, my brothers and sisters are like strangers to me because I never grew up in a family. I don't know what family is, which is a sad thing.

When she was eight, 'Merle' found out her father had died. She went to see a priest for comfort. She said that in the short time she was with him, the priest sexually abused her and only stopped when someone else walked into the room.

'Merle' told the Commissioner she disclosed the abuse to another girl but it got back to the nuns, who strapped her for her 'dirty thoughts' and 'talking filth'. 'Merle' said it was not uncommon for the nuns to beat or humiliate the children. She recalled them locking her in a room in 40 degrees Celsius heat without water, and how she had had to drink her own urine. Once, when she had wet the bed, 'Merle' said the nuns forced her to wear a nappy in public.

Moving from the orphanage to the world was also hard. 'Merle' said:

When I got out of the orphanage, they gave me eight dollars and kissed my butt bye-bye sort of thing. So I missed out on a lot of opportunities. I'm 61 now and I feel as though I'm like 20, like I haven't had a childhood, I haven't grown. I've married three times – third time lucky, I've got a good one now.<sup>287</sup>

'Merle' said she felt the loss of her Aboriginality and had tried hard in the years after leaving the orphanage to reconnect with her culture. She told the Commissioner she had completed two university degrees and worked in areas where traditional laws and spiritual practices still thrived.<sup>288</sup>

## Institutional contexts in the 1970s and 1980s

While the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors placed in institutions before 1970 were placed on missions, reserves or in related institutions, during the 1970s and 1980s survivors were more likely to be placed in family-based contexts such as foster and kinship care. This gradual shift in the provision of care from institutional to more family-oriented contexts, from non-Indigenous to Indigenous care, was a direct result of a change in government policy.

It is now widely recognised that the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP)<sup>289</sup> is the ‘single most significant change affecting welfare practice since the 1970s’.<sup>290</sup> Under the Principle:

All Australian jurisdictions now recognise, either in legislation or policy, that, when Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children are to be placed in substitute care, they should be placed within their own culture and community where possible. Each jurisdiction also recognises that Indigenous people should be consulted about placements.<sup>291</sup>

The Principle also determined that the removal of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child from their family should only occur as a last resort. While all Australian governments since 1970 have agreed to the Principle and enacted legislation or policy to bring it into effect, implementation across the states and territories has been mixed. Further information about the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle can be found in Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care*.

A number of survivors who were sexually abused after 1970 told Commissioners that the abuse occurred while they were in kinship care. It is important to note that the experiences of these survivors do not reflect those of the vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kinship care. Compared with other forms of out-of-home care, such as foster and residential care, rates of substantiated sexual abuse are low for kinship care.<sup>292</sup> It should be noted that abuse in kinship placements does not suggest children were abused by kin.

Survivors who were sexually abused while in kinship placement often described a poorly resourced system where institutional authorities had not properly overseen the safety of these placements. Survivors described some situations where child welfare workers and staff representing government departments with responsibility for child protection had not acted on their disclosures of sexual and other abuse. ‘Rosie’ told the Commissioner her mother had died when she was a baby and she was placed with extended family.<sup>293</sup> She said that in the mid-1980s when she was 10, she went to the Department of Child Protection and asked to be moved away from the care of her aunt and uncle due to physical abuse. ‘Rosie’ described the department’s reaction: ‘Oh, we can’t do anything about it. Can’t help you’. ‘Rosie’ went on to explain her frustration:

I’m telling them this is what happened to me, and why, why you couldn’t help me out – but they just more or less didn’t care about this child, because her mother is dead now, and who cares, we’ll just chuck it to a family member. The way I look at it is chucking Aboriginal kids to each family members, it’s not a good thing ... They should have looked into it a bit more – not just chuck a child into someone’s place like that.<sup>294</sup>

Five years later, 'Rosie' said she again approached the department for support after confronting her foster mother about child sexual abuse by her foster father and other men who came to the house. She said she told the department: 'I don't want to lock her up, I just want to get out of her household and find decent accommodation'. 'Rosie' said she had found a family who would take her in, but the department would not allow it:

They said, 'We can't do that, we have to take you to another family member'. I said, 'I don't want to go to a family member, because – what I'm telling you, I don't want to go through the same bullshit. I want someone that's actually going to care for me ... I don't want to go back into that environment. I want to get out, to make something of myself – be somebody' ... Nothing. They shoved me off, more or less.<sup>295</sup>

Survivors commonly talked about the ways that prejudice and racism shaped their treatment in institutions. These survivors often described being sexually abused in foster care or youth detention, and described racism in less explicit terms than survivors abused in previous decades. However, racism was often evident in their descriptions of how others showed a casual disregard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Many described racism as an everyday practice where 'white kids' were given preferential treatment over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.<sup>296</sup>

'Francis Peter' told the Commissioner that in the mid-1970s he was placed in a youth detention centre after he broke into a shop.<sup>297</sup> He said some of the older boys would bully him and try to engage him in sex – behaviours that the wardens observed but did nothing to stop. He said the wardens discriminated against the Aboriginal children by letting the white kids do the easier work in the kitchens, while the Aboriginal children were forced to do the more strenuous work in the dairy. 'Francis Peter' told the Commissioner that when he was 17, he stole a car. He said he was sent to an adult correctional centre that had a unit for youth offenders. However, 'Francis Peter' said he and the other Aboriginal children were placed in jail with the adults. 'I think the white boys, they did have a unit for them. But we were chunked in mainstream.'<sup>298</sup>

## Institutional contexts after 1990

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who were sexually abused more recently commonly described being abused in family-based out-of-home care settings such as foster care and kinship care. Many of these survivors told Commissioners that they understood why they had been removed from their birth families but could not fathom why they were placed in what they described as even riskier placements. They often pointed to the lack of screening of the people indirectly connected to their placement – cousins, uncles, boyfriends and older children of foster carers – as being a factor that increased their vulnerability to child sexual abuse. 'Skye', as mentioned earlier in this chapter, said she was two years old when she was placed in foster care and away from her family and culture.<sup>299</sup> She said she was physically abused in each of the multiple homes she lived in. She told the Commissioner how her foster grandfather at her first placement would sexually abuse her every time he babysat her:

He would watch what I now know to be pornographic movies and then he would do to me what was happening on the screen. This abuse occurred on many, many occasions and included oral, anal [and] vaginal penetration.<sup>300</sup>

‘Skye’ said she told her older sister, who also lived there, who told their foster mother. In response, ‘Skye’ said her foster mother ‘belted’ her and locked her in a room without food for a week. ‘Skye’ told the Commissioner she was also abused in other non-family placements: in one, her foster parents’ adult son, ‘James’, used to sexually abuse her in her bed at night. ‘Skye’ said she told her foster mother but ‘James’ ‘was a mummy’s boy. Mum didn’t believe it’.<sup>301</sup>

Other survivors described being sexually abused in youth detention settings after 1990. Some of these survivors told Commissioners about perpetrators who took advantage of lax institutional policies to have inappropriate contact with children, and how this often escalated to sexual abuse. ‘Oliver Patrick’ told the Commissioner he grew up in the 1990s, mostly in Sydney’s western suburbs.<sup>302</sup> He said his mum was in and out of jail when he was a kid, and his dad ‘was on his own mission’. Living ‘between households’, ‘Oliver Patrick’ said he often stayed with his grandmother or other relatives. He told the Commissioner that when he was seven, he was sexually abused a number of times by a boy twice his age. As a teenager, he said he started using substances, got into fights and was expelled from school. When he was 13, ‘Oliver Patrick’ said he ended up in youth detention, where one of the centre’s staff members, ‘Annette’, started sending him love letters. ‘Oliver Patrick’ said ‘Annette’ would ask him about his life and he began to trust her, telling her about the earlier abuse. ‘Oliver Patrick’ told the Commissioner:

I ended up crying one day, and she put her arm around me ... she started cuddling me, and then she went and kissed me on the cheek. And I was sort of thinking, this is a worker [at the youth detention centre].<sup>303</sup>

‘Oliver Patrick’ said he was released from youth detention but returned after reoffending. He said ‘Annette’ became his caseworker and the sexual abuse continued. ‘Oliver Patrick’ said that he believed other workers knew about the abuse – ‘because other inmates were saying that she was getting very close to me’. He said that he reported the abuse to the ‘boss, [but] he didn’t believe me, because he thought I was lying, he didn’t think his staff members would do it’.<sup>304</sup> ‘Oliver Patrick’ told the Commissioner he had since been sexually abused by several female staff members at youth detention centres.

### 5.4.3 Family context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors' descriptions of their family circumstances as children tended to differ according to the social and policy contexts of the time. As discussed previously, most survivors sexually abused before 1970 told Commissioners that before being removed or 'taken into care',<sup>305</sup> their lives were happy and they lived with family, learning culture and traditions. 'Carl' told the Commissioner he was cared for by his family prior to being 'stolen in April 1952'.<sup>306</sup> 'Carl' said his father did seasonal work, cutting timber, shearing, picking grapes and performing other farm jobs. 'Carl' said they had been living in Perth, but had left because of the widespread police harassment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Carl's' family had very little money. He told the Commissioner:

I lived in the bush with my mum and dad, all my life with them. It was a totally different life ... They gave us themselves ... That's far greater than any amount of money. As far as we were concerned we were very, very rich people living in the bush. And very healthy.<sup>307</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners their family had tried to maintain contact with them after they had been taken to residential institutions. Some survivors said their parents were able to find them, and maintained contact and advocated on their behalf. From the age of six, 'Dina' said she lived on a mission run by Benedictine nuns.<sup>308</sup> She told the Commissioner she ran away several times and her parents complained about how she was treated, but nothing changed. 'Dina' said the nuns told her parents, 'you can't do nothing. They're in our care'. 'Dina' told the Commissioner that sometimes her parents took her and her siblings out for holidays and they all cried when they had to go back to the mission.<sup>309</sup>

Many survivors told Commissioners that their parents went to great lengths trying to locate them. Many survivors also told Commissioners that institutional authorities often acted in ways to prevent this happening. 'Ellis Owen' said he lived in an Aboriginal boys' home, and remembered one day when his father came looking for him and his brother:

We could hear his voice. We could hear our father's voice. He said, where are my kids? He was there for about two hours ... He came looking for us, he knew where we was. It's his country, see, it's my father's country.<sup>310</sup>

'Ellis Owen' told the Commissioner that he and his brother were tied up and hidden in a shed until after their father left.

Other survivors said their parents were punished for trying to get them back. 'Naomi' told the Commissioner that she was taken from her parents when she was five months old and made a ward of the state in Queensland.<sup>311</sup> She said she was placed in a series of residential and foster homes, and was sexually and/or physically abused in most. 'Naomi' said her father often tried to reclaim her and her five siblings from care by demonstrating to the authorities that he had a full-time job and a house and could provide for them. She said her aunt and uncle also applied for custody. After being denied access through official channels, 'Naomi' said one day her father gathered up his sons and daughters from various institutions and took them home. Their time together did not last long, and the children were removed again. 'Naomi' said her father was charged and jailed for seven years. 'The trauma for my dad, it was worse than going to war.'<sup>312</sup>

Survivors who were sexually abused more recently also described coming from supportive families. 'Jameson' told the Commissioner that at the age of four, and on advice from government services, he was placed in a school for deaf children.<sup>313</sup> It was the mid-1980s, and 'Jameson' said he and other children slept in dormitories and were not allowed to use their voices. He also said they were subjected to frequent physical abuse. 'Jameson' told the Commissioner he remembered being beaten with a wooden spoon on his bare bottom, and being held down by staff and repeatedly 'belted' for fetching a glass of water during the night. 'Jameson' said he was sexually abused at the school, and he found it very difficult to talk about. He said he disclosed the abuse to his parents, who reported it to the school's principal. 'Jameson' said his parents removed him from the school and he understood that the school took no further action.<sup>314</sup>

Some survivors who were sexually abused after 1970 described growing up in families that were dealing with the compounding effects of intergenerational trauma, poverty and disadvantage. Some told Commissioners that they were removed by child protection authorities because their parents, who themselves had been forcibly removed and raised in institutions, were unable to care for them. Others said their mothers had voluntarily placed them into care because they were struggling to cope raising a family in poverty and wanted to protect their children from family violence. These survivors felt let down by a system that they and their parents believed was meant to help them. 'Melissa Jane' told the Commissioner that looking back, she can see that her mother 'did her best'.<sup>315</sup> When 'Melissa Jane' started staying out late and getting into trouble, she said her mother put her into care. After being moved through several placements, 'Melissa Jane' said she was placed in a government-run 'training centre' for girls where she was sexually abused by the manager.<sup>316</sup>

## 5.5 Experiences of disclosure

---

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described their experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. In many ways, their experiences of disclosure were similar to non-Indigenous survivors, especially those who were sexually abused in the same types of institutions or during the same time period.

Survivors told Commissioners of experiences of disclosure both as children and as adults. As with other survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often said they tried to disclose during childhood, but were ignored, dismissed or punished. Others said they kept silent at the time and they told their story later in life. Regardless of when they attempted to tell, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors' accounts show that disclosing child sexual abuse takes courage and that survivors need to feel safe to tell others about their experiences of abuse.

### 5.5.1 Disclosure in childhood

#### Fear and no one to tell

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners that as children they were fearful of disclosing sexual abuse. They feared that disclosure would make things worse, that they would not be believed, or that they would be punished. Survivors said that as children they feared retribution from perpetrators who continued to live or work in the institution where they lived. Many said they felt powerless, and given their situation they could not see the point of disclosing abuse. These and other barriers to disclosure meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often did not disclose sexual abuse in childhood. Of those who did, most said they received a negative response and did not disclose again for many years.

As with other survivors, one of the main barriers to disclosure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who were sexually abused on missions, children's homes, work placements and orphanages was having no one to tell. Survivors who lived in these institutions said that as children they had limited or no contact with relatives or other adults outside the institution. They felt powerless in the context of strict institutional hierarchies in which they described Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as having limited say over their own lives. Survivors often made reference to the broader culture of violence within the institutions, which institutional authorities seemed either to initiate, endorse or ignore. These survivors questioned whether, in this context, anyone would care about or listen to a child disclosing sexual abuse.



‘Bernard’ told the Commissioner he was sent to a ‘violent’ Catholic mission where it was common for the ‘slap happy’ priest and a lay teacher to beat children in the yard.<sup>317</sup> ‘Bernard’ remembered one time when the teacher threw a branch at a child, ‘and the kid ducked and it stabbed in the arm of another kid. But it didn’t worry [the teacher], he just pulled the stick out of his arm and kept on beating up on the other kid’.<sup>318</sup> ‘Bernard’ told the Commissioner that he was sexually abused by one of the priests. ‘Bernard’ said he never reported the abuse to anyone on the mission. He told the Commissioner he could never see the point. ‘It was isolated. You could never get out of the place. You could tell who you liked – it didn’t matter.’<sup>319</sup>

In the context of this harsh and often unpredictable physical violence, many survivors said they expected they would be punished if they told anyone about the sexual abuse. In many cases, this was borne out: most survivors who did tell said they were beaten as a result and institutional staff appeared to encourage or condone violence. Some said they were subjected to extreme punishments such as being forced to fight other children. ‘Frederick Paul’ told the Commissioner he and his older brother were taken from their mother during the 1950s.<sup>320</sup> They were placed in a government-run home for Aboriginal boys, a place ‘Frederick Paul’ described as ‘traumatising’. ‘Frederick Paul’ told the Commissioner that he was raped by older boys, but did not tell anyone because he was deeply ashamed. But when he was again touched by another boy, ‘Frederick Paul’ said he reported it to the manager:

I went up and told the manager that one of the boys was being rude to me – I don’t know whether I used the word ‘wanting to have sex’ or whatever because I don’t really know what sex would have been [at the time] ... I got the cane. He bent me over and he caned me.<sup>321</sup>

‘Frederick Paul’ said the other boy was also caned, and to resolve their conflict, the staff forced the two boys to fight one another in front of the other boys. He said this approach was common at the home:

I beat him. I was fighting for my arse, that’s what I was fighting for ... even while I was doing that, it was a sad time. I could see the blood coming out of him ... I wanted him to stop then. He couldn’t stop because they [staff] kept on pushing him in. We just kept on punching.<sup>322</sup>

‘Frederick Paul’ said he was raped a second time but did not tell anyone about that assault. He asked the Commissioner: ‘What was I going to do? Tell somebody to get flogged so I could get flogged again, and then bashed up? Even my brother ‘Bruce’, when he come back, what was I going to do, tell him?’<sup>323</sup>

Like other survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often described welfare workers and other authorities external to the institution as failing to ensure the children's safety and care. Some survivors said they never saw welfare workers on the grounds of their institution. Others said they saw them, but that these adults never spoke to the children in the institution. According to some survivors, even when there should have been evidence to arouse suspicion that sexual abuse was occurring, welfare workers never asked them what was going on. Some survivors said that they were hospitalised as children after sexual or physical abuse but medical staff did not ask how they were injured or take steps to ensure their safety and protection in the future. 'Derrick' told the Commissioner he was deeply traumatised after being raped by an older boy in a government-run Aboriginal boys' home.<sup>324</sup> He said that a staff member found him injured and bleeding and took him to hospital where they 'laid me on a table and sewed me up ... I think I was there for a week. I couldn't do a poo or anything like that'.<sup>325</sup> 'Derrick' said that no staff at the hospital or boys' home asked him about his injury, called the police, or offered him support or counselling. 'Derrick' explained he returned to the home, tried to avoid the culprit, and kept the incident a secret for decades.<sup>326</sup>

Survivors who were sexually abused more recently described barriers to disclosure that were similar to those described by older survivors. They commonly told Commissioners they felt they had no one to tell, and they feared not being believed. Again, the negative experiences of survivors who did disclose often gave credence to other survivors' fears that they would not be believed or would be threatened by the perpetrator if they disclosed. Survivors who were sexually abused in more recent times were less likely to fear being punished for disclosing abuse, and were less likely to be physically abused after disclosure.

## Disclosure to families

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who disclosed their experience of abuse while still children told Commissioners that they did so to adults who were in caring roles within their family context. The response to the child's disclosure tended to differ depending on the relationship between the perpetrator and the person to whom the victim disclosed. Survivors who were sexually abused in a foster care setting often said they were abused by a male related to the foster care placement, such as a foster father, a relative of the foster parents or the biological or foster son of the foster parents. Often, the person who heard the disclosure was married to or directly related to the perpetrator. Survivors in these situations often said that they were disbelieved or punished for disclosing. Sometimes they were accused of lying or were blamed for the abuse. 'Rosie' attended a private session to describe her experience of sexual abuse in a series of foster care placements.<sup>327</sup> She told the Commissioner that in the mid-1980s she was sexually abused by her foster father and other men who came to the house. She said:

I confronted my foster mother, about it, and she's turned around and said to me, 'Don't make trouble'. 'What you mean, don't make trouble? This person is touching me, how [am] I making trouble?' <sup>328</sup>

Other survivors who were sexually abused in foster care placements told Commissioners they did not disclose the abuse. Sometimes they felt they had no one to tell or would not be believed because of their age, their status in the family compared to the perpetrator's status, or their Aboriginality. 'Hazel' told the Commissioner that in the 1960s she and her sister were adopted by a non-Indigenous family who lived in Melbourne.<sup>329</sup> The parents had two biological sons: one in his early twenties and another who was 16. 'Hazel' said she was initially happy living with her new family, but when she was 10, the younger son began to sexually abuse her, and soon after, so did the other son. She said both boys threatened and manipulated her and she felt she could not report the abuse to anyone. 'Hazel' said the boys told her she was just a black kid and that their mum and dad would not believe her.<sup>330</sup>

Some survivors believed that others – especially women – in the foster care placement knew that the sexual abuse was occurring but did nothing to protect or support them. Some survivors attributed this to the women fearing violence or retribution from the perpetrator. 'Leah' told the Commissioner her foster father began sexually abusing her in the 1980s when she was three years old.<sup>331</sup> 'Leah' said her foster father was often physically violent towards her foster mother, who was afraid of him. She said her foster father would get her foster mother out of the house by giving her money to go gambling or shopping. This then gave him the opportunity to 'have his way' with 'Leah'. 'Leah' said she spoke with her foster mother about the abuse when she was in her early teens:

She called me over and said, 'I know what's going on. The reason why I'm not here during the day or the night, is because he puts money into my pocket and tells me to go, and if I don't go, he's going to bash me'. He used to beat her to a frigging pulp, just so he could get to me. She sat there, she had a cry, but I didn't cry ... She said to me that her own father did the same thing to her ... She had a son to her own father.<sup>332</sup>

Survivors who were sexually abused in foster and kinship care placements told Commissioners they experienced a range of reactions to their disclosures of the abuse. Disclosure of abuse often had the effect of fracturing family relationships. Some said that they had been believed after disclosing the abuse. Some spoke of how after members of their foster or kinship care family witnessed the abuse, they took action to prevent future abuse. They put locks on doors or prevented the perpetrator from having unsupervised access to them.

Sometimes, survivors said other members of the same family did not believe them and blamed them for causing problems within the family. 'Kalina' told the Commissioner she lived with her foster parents from when she was an infant in the 1980s.<sup>333</sup> She referred to them as her parents and they eventually adopted her. 'Kalina' said that life was 'okay' until the foster uncle started sexually abusing her. 'Kalina' said the perpetrator threatened to kill her father if she ever told

her parents. When she was 13, 'Kalina' said her foster aunt walked into a room while she was being sexually abused. She said the aunt was 'horrified' and acted decisively to make sure her husband was never around 'Kalina' again. The abuse stopped, and from that moment 'Kalina' began to feel safe. About two years later, 'Kalina' said she told her father about the abuse. He was very supportive and confronted the foster uncle, telling him never to come near the family again. When 'Kalina' was 23, she told her mother, but she did not believe her. This created a real problem in their relationship. Her foster aunt, who witnessed the abuse, 'now says she dreamt it ... which is making up lies'.<sup>334</sup>

Like other survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who were sexually abused in more recent times were more likely than those abused before 1970 to tell Commissioners their parents and some foster carers believed their disclosures and acted on their concerns. In many cases, these actions involved reporting the abuse to the authorities and trying to protect the child. Some survivors still found the process of disclosure difficult, even when they were met with positive responses.

'Lauren' told the Commissioner that when she was eight, her foster mother and father went on holidays, leaving her and her foster siblings in the care of another couple who operated a group home.<sup>335</sup> During her stay, 'Lauren' said she was sexually abused by the group home father and his father-in-law. After her foster parents returned home, 'Lauren' told her foster mother, who was angry and upset. Her foster mother rang the government agency responsible for 'Lauren' and took her to the police to report the abuse. 'It was terrifying', Lauren said. But, 'it felt also good to tell them what that person had done to me so he can never harm another child ever again'.<sup>336</sup> 'Lauren' said she later found out the couple operating the group home had been sacked immediately and that the police had taken action, arresting the group home father on several child sex offences. 'Lauren' said that following the abuse she had become 'withdrawn, scared and angry', but she was proud she had been brave enough as an eight-year-old to report it.<sup>337</sup>

## Survivor accounts: 'Christine', multiple placements and disclosing abuse

Some survivors told Commissioners about multiple instances of victimisation and of welfare authorities neglecting to protect them. 'Christine's' story, which follows, highlights some of the common experiences outlined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors.<sup>338</sup> These include:

- Welfare authorities being aware of child sexual abuse but not acting to protect the child, or to support the child following disclosure. In many cases, the child was returned to abusive situations.
- Children were often punished for disclosing child sexual abuse.

### **‘Christine’: Multiple placements and disclosing child sexual abuse**

‘Christine’ told the Commissioner that the Department of Community Services (DOCS) and other services had contact with her for many years and still she was left in and returned to abusive situations time and time again. ‘Christine’ recently accessed her official records, which showed that the authorities had been aware of the abuse since she was a baby. Despite this, ‘Christine’ was always sent back:

I was never safe. And I couldn’t understand why the agencies kept sending me back all the time. Like the hospitals, the police – these are people you go to, who you think are helping you.

‘Christine’ was placed in many foster homes. She told the Commissioner she was sexually abused at most of these homes: by the foster father at one home, by older children at another, by friends of the foster carer at a third and by the foster father and his sons at a fourth.

Regular visits from welfare officers did not provide ‘Christine’ with the opportunity to talk about what was happening at her foster homes. She told the Commissioner that departmental officers visited once a month or so:

to see how we were going. There’d be cups of tea and biscuits. The carer would put the big front up. And then DOCS would leave and then all the bad things would still be happening. I thought that person coming was supposed to be coming to help me. That person didn’t come and help me so I didn’t speak to them.

‘Christine’ did try to speak out on one of these visits. She said that during a DOCS visit, she and the officer went to the park and she told the officer what was happening. Back at the house, the officer told the foster carer what ‘Christine’ had said. And then the officer left. ‘I got bashed and raped – so I never spoke again.’<sup>339</sup>

## **Changing responses of police**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described different experiences of dealing with police depending on the age at which they disclosed. This section focuses on the experiences of survivors who reported the sexual abuse to police as children or young people, while Section 5.5.2 describes what survivors told Commissioners about reporting the abuse to police in adulthood.

Among the relatively small proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who disclosed sexual abuse to police before about 1970, most described negative experiences. Many of these survivors identified as being members of the Stolen Generations. This means that their early experiences with police involved being removed from their families and taken to institutions where they were abused. Survivors who ran away from abusive institutions as

children often told Commissioners that police returned them to the same institutions. Survivors said the police did not always ask why they ran away. When they did ask, and were told about the child sexual abuse, the police, like others at the time, did not believe the children. Some survivors told Commissioners that the police made Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children more vulnerable to child sexual abuse by refusing to believe them, and by continuing to return them to the very institutions they were trying to escape from. 'Sherrill', as noted earlier in this chapter, said she ran away from a mission affiliated with the Anglican Church in Western Australia several times – once running '30 miles' alone and in the dark – as she attempted to escape the multiple rapes and beatings she endured.<sup>340</sup> 'Every time I ran ... the police they didn't have a bar of it – they didn't care. The attitude was you are under the care of the mission and what they did was your punishment.'<sup>341</sup>

Survivors of recent abuse often spoke of more positive experiences with police. Some said they had directly disclosed the abuse to police officers who were supportive and made genuine efforts to protect them, which included removing them from abusive situations. Others said their allegations were investigated, and in some cases, perpetrators were convicted and sentenced. 'Rachael' told the Commissioner she was 10 years old in the mid-2000s when she was abandoned by her mother.<sup>342</sup> She said the Queensland child protective services placed her in the care of her biological father, who raped her. 'Rachael' said she was traumatised and unable to take action for several days:

I thought what the fuck am I going to do? I don't have a mum to turn to right now, I don't really have anyone to turn to. So I've gone to the police and I've sat up there for an hour, two hours, and I've spoken to them in tears. I said, 'I don't understand what's happened – was it right, was it wrong, what was it?' I thought, these people need to help me. I need to get the fuck out of my father's ... I said, 'Listen, this is what's happened, I need youse to do something about it'.<sup>343</sup>

'Rachael' said the police took her to the hospital where she stayed for several weeks with 24-hour police protection. She said that police and hospital staff alike treated her well. 'Rachael' told the Commissioner her father was arrested for the assault, convicted and jailed for 18 months. 'Rachael' said she felt this sentence was not long enough: 'They need to bring the death penalty back in for that kind of shit'.<sup>344</sup>

Other survivors of recent sexual abuse recounted negative experiences of disclosing to police. Some said the perpetrator was in the police force or had friends and relatives who were. Others believed that their previous involvement in crime affected the way the police responded to their disclosure of abuse. 'Peta' told the Commissioner she began a relationship with a 'bad boy' when she was 13 years old.<sup>345</sup> She said she would frequently visit the farm of the boy's father, 'Merv', who was a police officer, and that 'Merv' would supply 'Peta' and her friends with drugs and paint to sniff. 'Peta' told the Commissioner that 'Merv' and two other men raped her and held her for two days in a shed. She said she escaped and reported the rape

to police in a nearby suburb. She remembered her statement being taken and then being sent on her way. 'Peta' said no action was taken against 'Merv'. She told the Commissioner she believed police ignored her reports of sexual abuse because she was known as a substance abuser. She also thought 'Merv' was protected because he was in the police force.<sup>346</sup>

Years after the original assault, 'Peta' said detectives contacted her and told her there was evidence that 'Merv' had sexually abused three or four other girls. They wanted her to give evidence in court against him. 'Peta' said she cooperated with the police, but did not know the court outcome: 'I never fronted. I was too scared'.<sup>347</sup> 'Peta' said she later heard 'Merv' lost his job with the police force.

### Concerned and protective adults

Several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners that at the time of the sexual abuse they were in contact with adults within an institution – commonly teachers – they felt it would have been safe to disclose to, but did not. These survivors often said they understood that the adults were concerned for their welfare but at the time, they were not ready to disclose. Sometimes, the survivors said that they made partial disclosures to the adults but held back from telling the full story. 'Rosie' told the Commissioner she was regularly physically abused by her foster parents and sexually abused by her foster father and his friends.<sup>348</sup> 'Rosie' remembered some teachers and a school nurse who were good to her growing up. 'She was a good nurse; I used to cry to her a lot ... I never told her that I'd been molested. It's just more or less the bashings.'<sup>349</sup> 'Rosie' and other survivors often told Commissioners they appreciated the support and care offered by these adults. However, they were not ready to disclose and never told the adults the details of the abuse.

### 5.5.2 Disclosure in adulthood

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners about their experiences disclosing their experiences of child sexual abuse during adulthood. Older survivors commonly discussed the deep sense of shame they carried for many decades after the sexual abuse. Some reflected on how feelings of shame and embarrassment had prevented them from disclosing earlier. Almost one-fifth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (17.7 per cent) who talked about who they disclosed to told us that they disclosed for the first time to the Royal Commission.

## Disclosure to loved ones

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors disclosed their experience of sexual abuse to family, friends or partners in adulthood. Sometimes they had already told a sibling or other person about the abuse in childhood. However, not all survivors wanted to disclose the sexual abuse to family or partners. Shame, fear and a desire to protect loved ones from knowing had been, or continued to be, barriers to disclosure. This was particularly so for male survivors abused prior to 1970. Survivors often chose to disclose the abuse only to one person they trusted, and kept it hidden from others. 'Deb's' partner 'John' accompanied her to a private session.<sup>350</sup> 'Deb' said that she told 'John' her story to help him 'understand what's going on', particularly when she experienced nightmares. 'Deb' said that 'John' had recently read some of her notes which described how the abuse made her feel. 'Deb' told the Commissioner that 'John' 'sat down in the hallway and bawled'.<sup>351</sup>

## Disclosing to other victims

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners it had helped when they disclosed to former residents and survivors from the same institutions. In some cases, groups of former residents had reconnected as adults in an attempt to reconcile what had happened to them as children. Some found this difficult, especially if they came face-to-face with the people who had sexually abused them as children. Many, including some who confronted the people who had abused them, found the experience healing. 'Bert Terry' told the Commissioner he was taken from his family in the early 1950s and placed in a government-run home for Aboriginal boys.<sup>352</sup> He described the home as violent, abusive and dehumanising, and said he was physically and sexually abused throughout the 11 years he lived there. In recent years, 'Bert Terry' has reconnected with many of the survivors from the home. He said:

I never seen a lot of boys for 50 years but we still close to each other, we still part of each other and that's why the group is so strong that we can sit down now and talk about it – if you were to ask me [about the abuse] five years ago ... I would have told you to go and get stuffed. Because I was too ashamed because I thought it was my fault.<sup>353</sup>

'Bert Terry' said he and his 'band of brothers' recently returned to the institution. It was a significant moment that enabled him to reclaim his identity. He continues to meet with other male survivors, and travels the country educating the children of boys who were taken from their family and placed in the home:

We sit down and talk now, we're not ashamed, we're not afraid to ask difficult questions ... we were flogged into submission and now, as older men, now it's our turn to ask the questions. It's our turn to be answered ... We looked after each other in the homes. And we start looking after each other now ... we are a family ... We are starting to learn now that we are a human being like everyone else.<sup>354</sup>



## Disclosure to police and authorities

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors reported the sexual abuse to police in adulthood. They told Commissioners they had negative memories of police removing them from their families and taking them to abusive institutions. However, as adults, they found that the police treated them with respect and kindness and took action to investigate their claims. 'Neridah' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by several priests in primary and secondary school.<sup>355</sup> Many years later 'Neridah' said she contacted a support organisation that encouraged her to make a statement to police:

My naivety was that it would take an hour or two to tell this story. It took a couple of days. It was the first time in my life when the police were nice to me. It was very rare if you're Indigenous for a copper to be nice to you.<sup>356</sup>

Other survivors told us they had been traumatised by past experiences with the police and the criminal justice system and wanted to avoid being hurt or disappointed again. 'Nancey' told the Commissioner she had been sexually abused by a number of people including her stepfather, the local church minister and a boy at her school.<sup>357</sup> She believed her mother was complicit in the abuse. 'Nancey' said she had tried to tell people at the time what was happening but they told her she was telling lies, and that what was happening was normal – or in the case of police, they took no action beyond asking the perpetrator to apologise. 'Nancey' said she was later placed in foster care where she was again sexually abused.

'Nancey' said that later in life she had children who were also placed into foster care. Within four months, 'Nancey' said she had taken DOCS to the District Court and won her children back. She refused to seek professional help for herself because she was afraid any disclosure would result in her children being taken away from her again:

My kids are too traumatised. I can't let them be taken away again. That four months in foster care screwed them up forever. They're not the kids I had before they got taken away.<sup>358</sup>

Some survivors questioned the value of reporting the abuse to the police or engaging with the criminal justice system and had decided not to do so. In some cases, survivors questioned whether jail time was the most appropriate outcome for the person who had sexually abused them. This was more common among survivors who had been abused by family members or other children. 'Trent James' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by his foster brother, 'Xavier', when he was about five years old.<sup>359</sup> 'Trent James', who at the time of his private session was serving a prison sentence, said he had never reported 'Xavier' to police or other authorities because he did not see any value in 'Xavier' going to prison. 'Him going to jail doesn't make me feel any better, it does nothing for me. So what's the point of him going to jail? That's the way I look at it.'<sup>360</sup>

In other cases, survivors were concerned about the impact that reporting to police may have on their own family or on members of the perpetrator's family. Some understood that their family members had also been victims of sexual abuse and wanted to wait until they were also ready to disclose. Others said that they did not want to involve the perpetrator's innocent family members in a public court process. 'Deb' told the Commissioner she was placed in a government-run detention facility as a young teenager.<sup>361</sup> 'Deb' said that for the duration of the seven months she was in the facility, she was sexually abused by one of the night staff, who exchanged sex for cigarettes. 'Deb' said she told her mother at the time, but she did not believe her and accused her of lying to get out of the facility. 'Deb' told the Commissioner that she had never thought of reporting the perpetrator to police, and would not do so now. 'Not to protect him, but he's got family. He's got kids, he's got grandkids and I don't believe his kids and his grandkids should have to live through his dramas.'<sup>362</sup>

## Disclosure through redress

Like other survivors, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described the process of seeking redress or compensation as difficult. Many survivors who attended a private session had participated in a redress scheme or pursued compensation through civil proceedings, or were considering doing so. Many described the process of disclosing the details of the abuse in front of numerous people they did not know as uncomfortable, and some were unable to do so at all. Some described the process as cold, hurried and convoluted. Others said they felt pressured into accepting what they believed were unsatisfactory agreements.

Some survivors told Commissioners they had not told their whole story during the redress process because of their ongoing sense of shame. In some cases, survivors received less money than they otherwise might have because they felt unready to disclose the details of the sexual abuse. 'Raelene' told the Commissioner she and her siblings were placed on a mission during the 1960s, where the nuns treated the children very badly.<sup>363</sup> She said they cut off her hair, made her take cold showers and put her to work in the laundry. The children had no shoes and had to eat porridge with weevils in it. Physical abuse was common and the nuns administered punishment with 'a big, long leather strap'.<sup>364</sup> 'Raelene' also said that 'every girl that got in trouble' had to sleep in the bed closest to the chapel, and that when she slept in that bed someone – 'Raelene' did not know whether it was a man or woman – would come in the night and sexually abuse her. 'Raelene' said she applied to the relevant state redress scheme some years ago, but felt too embarrassed to give details of the sexual abuse to the scheme's administrators. She said this affected her payment, meaning she received significantly less compensation than if she had been able to tell the whole story. 'Raelene' said she had a similar experience when seeking compensation from the Catholic Church.<sup>365</sup>

## 5.6 Wellbeing

---

### 5.6.1 Survivors' perceptions of their lives

Survivors commonly discussed the factors that had affected their wellbeing since they were sexually abused. The large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors (96.1 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the impacts of their experiences of child sexual abuse on their lives. The vast majority of these survivors (95.6 per cent) said they had experienced poor mental health at some time in their lives. Many also discussed relationship problems (70.1 per cent) and experiences of educational and economic disadvantage (56.0 per cent). Many survivors discussed these issues in the context of broader trauma associated with being removed from family, country and culture.

#### Mental health concerns

Like all survivors in private sessions, almost all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described experiencing mental health issues at some time in their life. Some had been diagnosed with conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression. Descriptions of 'flashbacks' to the abuse were common. Some survivors also spoke of having thought about and/or attempted suicide, both at the time of the abuse and in the years that followed. 'Deb' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by a staff member in a government-run detention facility.<sup>366</sup> She said she still had nightmares about the abuser and had attempted suicide several times. She was unable to use prescription medication for her PTSD because this would adversely affect her ability to perform her job, which involved operating machinery.

As with other survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors talked about using alcohol and other drugs as a way of handling the ongoing trauma of their childhood experiences that included sexual abuse. Often using alcohol and other drugs was the only way survivors knew of dealing with these problems. 'Coral' told the Commissioner she was taken from her mother when she was five years old.<sup>367</sup> She said she was sexually abused by her foster father, and later went to live with her grandmother. 'Coral' said that when she was 13, she started drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana, and in the years that followed, drug use took over her life. She told the Commissioner:

I just used drugs so I didn't have to think. To a point where I'd get money and just – that was my bandaid, in a way, so I didn't have to think of what happened, and why. And blame myself.<sup>368</sup>

Other survivors described using drugs and alcohol in the years immediately following the abuse to avoid thinking about, or to dull the pain associated with, the abuse. Some felt that their early substance use may have contributed to the onset of mental health problems. Survivors often reflected on the pain that their substance use had caused the people closest to them, and many found strength in this to stop self-medicating and seek help. 'Blake William' told the Commissioner he was separated from his siblings and placed on a mission when he was 10.<sup>369</sup> 'Blake William' said he was sexually abused by one of the missionaries and ran away in an attempt to find his parents. He said he later became homeless, stole to survive and began drinking heavily 'to handle the terrible things that happened to me'.<sup>370</sup> 'Blake William' said he now recognises that he has not been an ideal role model to his own children because of his alcohol abuse. He said he regretted that substance abuse had become a big part of his children's lives too. One of his children died from a drug overdose and his daughter has issues with substance use. 'Blake William' told the Commissioner he gave up drinking because his doctor told him otherwise he would die. 'I really thought about it. I want to live, see my grandkids.'<sup>371</sup>

## Child removal and dislocation from family, country and culture

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors spoke of being removed from their birth families early in life and placed on missions, in children's residential homes and in foster homes. Some children never saw their families again. Many of these survivors told Commissioners they believed that their removal initiated a process of dislocation from country and culture. Most felt disconnected from their family and culture and some felt no connection at all with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. 'Christine' told the Commissioner she was repeatedly sexually abused on a mission and in foster homes.<sup>372</sup> This abuse sometimes led to hospitalisation, but she said she was always returned to the place where the abuse was occurring. 'Christine' said she now has her own children and is learning to read with them. 'Christine' told the Commissioner that she has no connection with Indigenous culture, and nor do her children. 'Culture doesn't exist to me.'<sup>373</sup>

Other survivors told us the process of removal and subsequent abuse in institutional settings caused trauma, which manifested in relationship difficulties passed from generation to generation. Many survivors described having non-existent or strained relationships with birth parents and siblings, unhealthy intimate relationships, and difficult relationships with their own children. For many survivors, the trauma of being sexually abused as a child is inseparable from the trauma of cultural abuse. 'Naomi' told the Commissioner she was taken from her parents as an infant, and sexually and physically abused in a series of residential and foster care placements.<sup>374</sup> 'Naomi' said she found out she was Aboriginal in her late thirties. She was accepted by the community, but said she grieved for her lost heritage, the lost bond with her siblings, and for growing up without knowledge of who she was. 'I missed out on my culture. I missed out on being an Aboriginal.' 'Naomi' said she had noticed similar patterns among many people who had lived in institutions as children. She told the Commissioner that some, like her, had found 'refuge in drugs and alcohol' and experienced violent relationships:

We were so desensitised to pain and hurt it was nothing compared to what we lived with in the home. We stayed in places that hurt us. We didn't leave. I let my children grow up in domestic violence. Generation after generation after generation.<sup>375</sup>

## Relationships with family members

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors commonly described the impacts of removal and sexual, physical and emotional abuse on their relationships with partners, their own children and their parents and siblings.

### Relationships with partners

Like all survivors, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors described having difficult intimate relationships as adults. Many survivors told Commissioners about becoming involved in abusive relationships. Some survivors believed a lack of suitable adult relationship role models when they were children – with abusive relationships sometimes the only model – led them towards abusive relationships as adults. 'Sherrill' told the Commissioner she was sexually and physically abused on a mission for 10 years.<sup>376</sup> She said that a lasting impact of the abuse was her attitude to sex – 'this shameful feeling and to me I feel that sex is dirty'. 'Sherrill' told us that her late husband 'was insanely jealous' and 'used to continuously rape me, belt me and since he died ... I've never even looked at a man'.<sup>377</sup>

Many survivors believed their trust in people had been undermined as a result of being sexually abused as children. Many felt this deep sense of distrust continued into their adult relationships, including their intimate relationships. Some said that they continued to feel shame about the abuse, affecting their ability to be open and honest with other people. 'Jonas' said he was sexually abused by an older boy when he was living in a boys' training school.<sup>378</sup> He told the Commissioner that, for a long time, he felt confused about his sexuality. He said he experienced ongoing issues associated with sexuality and trust that affected his capacity for intimate relationships. 'Jonas' told the Commissioner he had never disclosed the abuse to his intimate partners:

For such a long time I thought I was gay. It is still very hard for me to be open with women ... I am scared they might find out what happened and what they would say if they did. I have never talked about it. I have trust issues and I find it very hard to be close to people.<sup>379</sup>

## Relationships with children

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors discussed becoming pregnant after being sexually abused. Many of these survivors living on missions or in other residential institutions before about 1970 described having their babies taken at birth without their consent. 'Sherrill' told the Commissioner that she and other girls were regularly sexually abused on the mission by the white missionaries' sons.<sup>380</sup> 'Sherrill' said at least six of the girls, some of them her relatives, became pregnant from the rapes. She said they were sent to a hospital for unmarried women in Fremantle, Western Australia, under the pretext that they had 'gone for a holiday'. The babies were then adopted out – without consulting the mothers. Some of those babies, 'Sherrill' later learned, were adopted by families as far away as New South Wales and the ACT, and many never have reclaimed their Aboriginal heritage.<sup>381</sup>

Survivors who had babies after being raped described feeling protective of their children, telling Commissioners it did not matter how they were conceived. Some of these survivors were young at the time, and said they felt they were not in a position to care for a baby. In an effort to protect their children, and in the absence of appropriate support services, some relinquished their babies from their care. 'Leah' told the Commissioner she was repeatedly physically and sexually abused by her foster father when she was in kinship care during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>382</sup> 'Leah' said when she was 15 she became pregnant to him and had a baby girl, whom she called 'Janie'. She explained to the Commissioner why she felt she had to give her daughter up and why she still feels a strong connection with 'Janie', despite the circumstances of her conception:

I was 15. I couldn't have my daughter in my life. I had to give her up, give her away. I feel like a really bad person, which I still do ... I grieve for her, because she was my first. I don't see her as that, [as a] paedophilia's child. She came from my womb. She was from me. If she bleeds, I bleed.<sup>383</sup>

'Leah' said her foster father threatened her by saying he would take custody of their daughter and this finally prompted her to report the abuse to police. 'I saw a light. There was a light at the end of this tunnel, and it was my daughter. When I saw my daughter, she was the one who woke me up.'<sup>384</sup>

Survivors who went on to have babies in the years following the sexual abuse sometimes told Commissioners they had experienced difficulty providing adequate care for their children. Some had relinquished their children and others said their children had been removed from them or had become estranged. Raising children was particularly difficult in families trying to cope with the strain of intergenerational trauma and the chronic stress of poverty. 'Isabelle' told the Commissioner she had several children with a physically abusive partner, whom she later left.<sup>385</sup> 'Isabelle' said she lost custody of her children after experiencing depression and anxiety, and she later became estranged from all but one of them, as well as from her granddaughter.

'Isabelle' told the Commissioner:

I don't see her anymore because my kids think, I don't know, they think I'm an arsehole. They think I'm useless. But I'm not. I've struggled all my life, and now I just wish that they'd love me again.<sup>386</sup>

Other survivors told us they learned unhealthy caregiving styles when they were children in an institution where discipline was harsh and cruel – and that they played out these patterns of behaviour with their own children. Survivors told Commissioners they regretted times when they had been emotionally or physically abusive with their children, and that they had struggled to parent effectively in times of stress or hardship. 'Rosie' told the Commissioner she was physically and emotionally abusive towards her children because that was how her foster mother had treated her.<sup>387</sup> Her children mostly live with her ex-partner and she feels they do not really want to know her. 'When I went there it's like I'm talking to nobody, they're not my kids ... "Who are you? You're not our mother – you wasn't around for us." Things like that. Horrible.'<sup>388</sup>

### **Relationships with parents and siblings**

Survivors who had been removed from parents and siblings as children often described the mixed emotions they felt upon reconnecting with family. Many found being with family painful, because it reminded them of all they had lost. Despite the pain, many survivors also described the sense of peace and connection that came from reconnecting with kin. 'Avril' said she was 12 when she and her siblings were removed from their family.<sup>389</sup> She and her little sister were taken to a Salvation Army home in regional Queensland. She told the Commissioner:

When I got there all I wanted to do was go back home to Mum, and I often wonder how Mum and Dad must have felt the day they took us away ... I remember they hitchhiked to see us. I told my sister I knew Mum cared.<sup>390</sup>

'Avril' said that as an adult she was reunited with her family, but that her little sister had since died. She said she did not understand why her family was split up, but drew strength from the connection they now shared:

Why take kids away from their families? Kids should be with their family and they should be supported all together as one ... Eventually our whole family was reunited. Even though we were all separated as children we are still close now as adults.<sup>391</sup>

Some survivors described being reunited with their birth parents many years after being 'taken into care'.<sup>392</sup> Many of these survivors said they found it difficult to reconnect with them, sometimes because they could not understand why they had 'given them up'. Often, the answers were complicated. In reality, children may have been removed because they were from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families. 'Beatrice Jane' said she was taken from her grandmother's home when she was about three years old in the mid-1960s.<sup>393</sup> 'Beatrice Jane' said she grew up thinking she had been removed because of her mother's alcohol problems. She told the Commissioner that later, when she discussed it with her mother, she found this was not the case:

I went through all that pain on my own ... and then I got to know my mother ... and I asked ... 'Why' ... she explained to me, she done everything they asked her to. She got a job. She gave up the grog. But every time she asked, 'Can I have my children back', they just turned around and said 'Nuh'.<sup>394</sup>

Some survivors experienced difficulty reconnecting with family. Sometimes, these survivors were taken as very young children and had no memories of their lives before being institutionalised. Other survivors said they found connecting with family difficult because they did not feel they were accepted by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community. 'Bert Terry' told the Commissioner that he was removed from his birth family as a five-year-old and placed in a children's home, where he was sexually abused for 11 years.<sup>395</sup> When he returned to his home on the mission, he discovered his parents had died. 'Bert Terry' said that from that time on, he felt he had lost his identity, that he did not belong anywhere:

We were took with white people, so when we went to the blacks ... blackfellas said, 'You're not Aborigine, you're white', we go to the whitefellas, 'Oh no, you can't come here, you're black'. We still don't belong anywhere. You know, my brother is 74 and he still won't talk to me. And ... he lived at [the reserve] and when I go out there they ask, 'Oh, what are you doing here?'<sup>396</sup>

## 5.6.2 Barriers to strength and survival

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors discussed the barriers they had encountered in making sense of and managing the impacts of their experiences of child sexual abuse. Survivors who had been abused in residential institutions commonly described the frustration and disappointment they experienced – first with getting access to the records of their time in care and then finding out how little information these records often contained. Like other survivors, these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors also said they had been negatively affected by the poor quality support services they received and the way redress schemes were managed.



## Records

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who were removed as young children were not able to remember details of their birth parents. Most told Commissioners that they felt it was important to find out more about their family background as well as their own childhoods. Many considered the records of their time in care, as well as other records such as contact with the police, to be important in helping them understand where they had come from.

Some survivors obtained and viewed their records but found they were of little use as they were often inconsistent and full of gaps. Survivors told Commissioners that the lack of reliable and complete information about their childhood experiences often contributed to an ongoing sense of frustration and disappointment. They wanted to know who their parents were, where they were from and why they had been removed. Sometimes there was not even a record of the names of the institutions in which they spent most of their young lives. Some felt the lack of information in official records was indicative of the lack of respect institutions had historically shown toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and showed how little value they placed on their lives. 'Ellis Owen' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused in a children's home for two years.<sup>397</sup> When he obtained his records in the early 2000s, he found most of the information had been redacted:

When I opened it up it was all blacked out. What are they hiding? They still hiding things ... If they want to get on in this world, make it a better country, they should open up and face the truth themselves. Start admitting what they did.<sup>398</sup>

Other survivors who obtained and viewed their records found them distressing because they highlighted the institution's poor standards of care and the lack of effective institutional oversight. 'Aunty Meg' told the Commissioner she was sexually and physically abused by her foster father over a 10-year period.<sup>399</sup> She said her records demonstrated that authorities had held concerns about her welfare in the foster home but had not taken any investigative action. 'Aunty Meg' said that reading through her file was distressing because it made clear to her some of the failures of the system that was meant to protect her. She believed more should have been done to investigate what was happening with her foster father. 'No one knew of me and I felt very alone.' Later, no one looked out for her. She told the Commissioner:

Workers did not take the time to speak to me. There was a failure to attempt to read between the lines concerning requests to leave particular institutions ... or to follow up about occurrences that had affected me.<sup>400</sup>

## Professional support

Like many other survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often said that mental health and wellbeing professionals were not equipped to address many of the issues they faced. Few appeared to understand or have the skills to address the intergenerational and collective trauma caused by the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, land and culture. Fewer were equipped to deal with the compounding effects of child sexual abuse and other factors such as poverty and ill-health. 'Ellis Owen' told the Commissioner he believed mental health professionals did not understand the impact of children being removed from their families.<sup>401</sup> He said that mental health professionals needed to talk to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to get a real understanding of the issues they faced:

[They] need more education, and not from books. Talk to the people. That's where a lot of us get the shits with a lot of people, they think they know everything about the Stolen Generation because they read about it.<sup>402</sup>

'Ellis Owen' told the Commissioner he gives talks about his life in schools and jails. 'They should have more Indigenous people in there, to actually talk about culture ... And make sure that you still remember your people.'<sup>403</sup>

## Redress

Like other survivors, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners that they found the experience of accessing redress insensitive and distressing. Some survivors said they received a financial payment or an apology, and they expressed many different perspectives on the value of these gestures. Some believed financial compensation was important, while others thought the payment was inadequate given the suffering that the institutional child sexual abuse had caused. Most said the money did not go very far. Some said they had received lower payments than they might have been entitled to because they were not supported to fully disclose the sexual abuse. Others felt the money was offered on a 'take it or leave it' basis and they had no choice but to accept. Some said they received a small payment in recognition of 'stolen wages' for unpaid labour in the institution. Some were not interested in money or did not believe that it would help, and had chosen not to pursue compensation.

Survivors also had mixed feelings about the value of a formal apology from governments or from the institutions where the sexual abuse had occurred. Some appreciated the apology they received, while others were cynical about whether the apology was genuine. Some survivors felt that an acknowledgement of responsibility and a sincere apology was more important than financial compensation. Many felt that money could never adequately compensate for the abuse they had experienced. 'Francis Peter' told the Commissioner he received two small payments through a state government redress scheme.<sup>404</sup> He said he was not represented by a lawyer during the process and thought the amount he received was small compared to what other survivors were granted. On the value of monetary compensation, 'Francis Peter' told the Commissioner:

It's not really saying sorry, it's saying shut up ... But that's all we can take, because we're not going to get anything better out of it ... I'm sick of that word 'sorry', it means nothing ... I just hate people saying sorry to me, because I know it means nothing ... And I'm sorry that justice comes down to money.<sup>405</sup>

Other survivors who had not sought compensation but were considering doing so, made a distinction between the culpability of the institution and the individual perpetrators. Many, and especially those who had been sexually abused by children with harmful sexual behaviours, viewed the institution as primarily responsible for the abuse. 'Trent James' told the Commissioner he was abused by his foster brother in a foster placement during the 1990s.<sup>406</sup> He said he was not interested in compensation if it was going to cause the older boy hardship. 'I just don't see how that benefits anyone ... I wouldn't want someone doing it to me, so I wouldn't do it to someone else.' 'Trent James' said he feels differently about compensation paid by the state, which was responsible for his care at the time he was abused. 'If they had done their job right, that wouldn't have happened to me.' Still, he told the Commissioner, 'I'd prefer their apology to the money any day'.<sup>407</sup>

### 5.6.3 Sources of strength and survival

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often told Commissioners about the sources of strength they relied upon, and their resilience to cope with the effects of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. Most often, these survivors pointed to connections with family, community and culture.

## Family

Of survivors who spoke to us about a sense of positive wellbeing, many attributed it to their close and loving relationships with family. In particular, these survivors often said they found a sense of peace and joy during their later years as they became involved with raising their grandchildren. Some felt that they had reconciled with their past in recent years, allowing them to be a better grandparent than they had been a parent. 'Loreena' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused on a mission during the 1960s and had her first child when she was 16.<sup>408</sup> She said she felt guilty about how she had treated her own children, but had come to a new place with her grandchildren and took great joy in this. 'The love that I never gave my children, my grandchildren got it. I love them dearly.'<sup>409</sup>

Other survivors told Commissioners they were proud of the way they had been able to provide for their children, and that they had not repeated the abusive parenting styles learnt in institutions. They saw their children and grandchildren achieving at school and in sport and drew hope and inspiration from them. 'Vernon Lewis' spent some time in his private session discussing his experience of sexual abuse and the impacts it had had on his life.<sup>410</sup> He also discussed the joy he received from spending time with his wife and family. He said he recently attended a speech day for one of his grandchildren, who had received a prize and given a performance. 'Vernon Lewis' said his wife was in tears and he was proud to see his family thriving after his own difficult start in life:

I love my wife and kids very much, especially my grandkids. They're awesome to be around ... They make me laugh. We tell each other stories, and share jokes, and I love looking after my grandkids.<sup>411</sup>

Other survivors echoed 'Vernon Lewis's' sentiment, telling Commissioners they were proud that, in their families at least, the cycle of being removed as a child and sexually abused while in care had ended with their generation. Some acknowledged their experiences of sexual abuse had affected the way they treated their children in other ways, such as by being overprotective and strict. 'Conner' told the Commissioner he was removed from his mother's care when he was about nine and placed in a children's home, where he was sexually abused.<sup>412</sup> Despite feeling angry about the injustice of this into adulthood, 'Conner' said he married, had children, had a good relationship with his wife, and worked in a job he liked. 'Conner' said he was proud that none of his children or grandchildren had been placed into care, and he is now focused on keeping his relationships strong and healthy:

You can't do much about what I've been through and the other boys have been through. It's about getting the kids coming up behind us, start teaching them and learning early. A little push in the right direction might make a big, big difference.<sup>413</sup>

## Community and culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors often told Commissioners about making and taking opportunities to find work or complete educational qualifications, whether in childhood or later in life. They spoke about these experiences as giving them a sense of achievement and pride, as well as enhancing their employment opportunities. Some said employment and education gave them the opportunity to give back to their communities. As noted in her story in Section 5.4.2, 'Merle' left the orphanage feeling ill-prepared for the outside world.<sup>414</sup> However, as an adult, 'Merle' told the Commissioner she had completed two university degrees, to 'prove to people that I was not stupid ... I went on and kept on studying all my life, and paid for it myself'. 'Merle' said she had strived hard to reconnect with her culture and had found solace working in areas where traditional laws and spiritual practices still thrived.

Some survivors told Commissioners that reconnecting with the institution they grew up in and the people associated with the institution was an important part of their healing. These survivors often said they felt understood when they connected with others who had lived at the institution; they believed an important part of their healing was in sharing experiences and memories. Some said they provided support to other survivors' children, and that sharing information and experiences had a healing effect for everyone involved. 'Bert Terry' told the Commissioner he believed it was important to educate survivors' children about why their fathers may have been physically or emotionally abusive towards them.<sup>415</sup> He said survivors' children needed to know how being sexually, emotionally and physically abused had contributed to their fathers' relationship difficulties with partners and children. 'Bert Terry' told the Commissioner, 'We want to go to every town where all the home boys are from and tell them why their fathers never talked to them, and why they never loved their mothers'.<sup>416</sup>

Other survivors also described the enjoyment and pride they derived from working with their local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, sometimes through volunteering or other community-based work. They often spoke of the satisfaction and sense of connection they received from giving back to a community they had been removed from during their childhood. 'Agnes', who said she was sexually abused as a 15-year-old domestic servant in the care of the state, told the Commissioner that her faith gave her strength, and that she has spent her life helping others.<sup>417</sup> She has received rewards from government and from organisations for her community work. For three decades, 'Agnes' worked getting young children to preschool, and speaks of her concern about the lack of schools and day care where Aboriginal children can learn culture. She still organises get-togethers for Aboriginal elders, arranges for flowers to be placed on graves on the mission where she grew up, and shares her story with groups and schools. 'Agnes' said she feels it is important to remember the mission, and to help people who have lived there keep in touch with each other. 'I think you need to have reunions, to keep us old people together ... They are like a family'.<sup>418</sup>

Some survivors described the healing effect of reconnecting with country and culture following their time in residential institutions as children. Many of these survivors were older when they were taken away and could recall learning and living in traditional ways. They often said they drew strength from connecting with country and culture in a way that helped bring perspective to their lifetime experiences. 'Carl' told the Commissioner he was taken from his family as a nine-year-old.<sup>419</sup> He believed he survived being sexually abused on a Methodist mission during the 1950s and 1960s because of what he had learned from his grandfather. Before he was taken from his family, 'Carl' said he lived in a supportive community where he was familiar with cultural traditions and had practised them for a long time. On the mission, he said he was 'flogged' for speaking his language or practising his culture, but survived it by thinking of his grandfather:

I could see my grandfather standing over me and driving me forwards ... He was the greatest man I've known. My grandfather left a legacy in me, in my person, that's stood me, as it stood him, in good stead.<sup>420</sup>

'Carl' told the Commissioner he is also returning to the ways he grew up with:

Now that I've finished all my studies, I'm retired, I'm at an age where I'm a senior, I'm starting to look back and I'm saying to myself, 'Where are those things that are better? What has the colonial brought us that is better?' And I'm going back to the bush. So it's full circle.<sup>421</sup>

## 6 Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

### 6.1 Overview

---

Chapter 6 describes the common themes that emerged from our analysis of the experiences of child sexual abuse for victims and survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We conducted:

- qualitative analysis of a sample of 50 narratives written from the accounts given during private sessions by survivors from linguistically diverse backgrounds
- quantitative analysis of the accounts given during private sessions of 213 survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Royal Commission reviewed private session summaries to determine whether survivors identified as culturally or linguistically diverse at the time of the abuse, in accordance with the definition below.

#### 6.1.1 Defining culturally and linguistically diverse background

The Royal Commission adopted a broad definition of culturally and linguistically diverse background to mean anyone from a cultural or linguistic context different from the dominant culture, and who is not an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. This included first generation migrants, people born in Australia whose ancestors migrated here long ago, temporary visitors, refugees, asylum seekers, or anyone with uncertain visa status. Our definition also included survivors who did not speak English as a first language, or who lived in a community where English was not the main language spoken. In addition, we included survivors who were born in Australia and spoke English as a main language but identified as belonging to a cultural community other than the dominant culture.

Our definition of culturally and linguistically diverse background generally excluded people born outside of Australia who spoke English as a first language and whose cultural context was broadly similar to the dominant culture at the time of their arrival in Australia. For the purposes of our inquiry, most, though not all, survivors who arrived in Australia from the United Kingdom under the Child Migrants Scheme were not considered culturally or linguistically diverse. The experience of survivors who identified as Former Child Migrants is covered in more detail in Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*.

The Royal Commission consulted with representatives from a number of multicultural groups and conducted a number of community forums to increase the participation of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in private sessions. While these community representatives acknowledged the importance of the Royal Commission's work, relatively few survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds attended private sessions. Barriers to disclosure for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may have prevented some community members from coming forward. These barriers are discussed in Section 6.5 of this chapter and also in Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse*.

## 6.2 Profile of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

---

Of the 6,875 survivors and/or their family and friends who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017 to share their experiences of child sexual abuse in Australian institutions, 213 (3.1 per cent) identified as having a culturally or linguistically diverse background.<sup>422</sup> Some were born in Australia, and others came to Australia with or without their families at different periods in history. Many of those who were born outside of Australia arrived in the immediate postwar era from countries including Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and The Netherlands. Several survivors came to Australia from Malta, alone or with siblings, as part of child migration schemes.<sup>423</sup> Others arrived more recently from Lebanon, China and Vietnam. Some had sought refuge in Australia to escape persecution, war, dislocation and other trauma.

Despite the diversity of the group, there were some similarities among these survivors' experiences and common themes emerged. They also had much in common with the larger group of survivors in private sessions who were not classified as growing up in culturally or linguistically diverse settings.

Of the 213 survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who attended private sessions:

- the majority (70.0 per cent) were male
- over half (52.6 per cent) indicated they were aged over 50 when they attended a private session and less than one in 10 (9.4 per cent) were under 30
- the majority (80.3 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused prior to 1990
- 1.4 per cent said they were a person with disability at the time of the sexual abuse.

The average age of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds at the time of their private session was 50.5 years – 51.6 years for males and 48.0 years for females.



To protect their identity and maintain confidentiality, survivors from small religious communities who participated in private sessions were included in the quantitative analysis but excluded from the qualitative analysis.

Further information about the culturally and linguistically diverse survivors who participated in private sessions is provided at Appendix Q.

## 6.3 Experiences of abuse

---

During private sessions, survivors chose what they wanted to share with Commissioners. The majority of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds did talk about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced as children. They told Commissioners what happened to them, the institutions where it happened and who sexually abused them.

This section reports quantitative information that takes into account the varying numbers of survivors who provided information about the different types of sexual abuse they experienced.<sup>424</sup>

### 6.3.1 Nature of the abuse

Almost nine out of 10 survivors from culturally and linguistically backgrounds (86.9 per cent) told Commissioners details about their age when they were first sexually abused. Almost half of this group (49.2 per cent) told Commissioners they were between the ages of 10 and 14 when they were first sexually abused in an institutional context. One-third of this group (33.0 per cent) said they were aged between five and nine, and 14.6 per cent indicated they were aged between 15 and 17. A small proportion (3.2 per cent) said they were very young children (aged under five) when they were first sexually abused. On average, survivors said they were 10.7 years old when the abuse began – 10.9 years for males and 10.2 years for females.

Most survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (93.0 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the frequency of the abuse. Among these survivors, 84.8 per cent said they experienced multiple episodes of child sexual abuse. Among survivors who discussed the duration of the abuse (75.6 per cent), the majority (60.9 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused as a child for one year or less. Over one-third (37.9 per cent) said they were sexually abused for between two and five years, and close to one in 10 (7.5 per cent) said they were sexually abused as a child for more than five years.

The majority of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (86.4 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the types of sexual abuse they experienced. Among this group (noting that many experienced multiple episodes and types of sexual abuse):

- the majority (79.3 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact abuse, such as sexual touching of their body or being made to touch the perpetrator's body
- just under half (46.2 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving penetration (for example, penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, another body part or an object)
- almost one-quarter (24.5 per cent) described experiences where their privacy was violated, such as being forced to undress in front of someone or being watched while showering
- just over one in five (21.2 per cent) described experiences consistent with being groomed for sexual contact (for example, behaviours that manipulate and control the child, their families and other support networks, or institutions, with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence, and avoiding discovery of the sexual abuse)
- more than one in 10 (12.5 per cent) described experiences consistent with being exposed to sexual acts and material (for example, having sexual acts performed in front of them, having genitals exposed to them, or being shown pornographic material).

Just over half of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (53.1 per cent) discussed experiencing other forms of abuse before, during and after being sexually abused. Most (82.3 per cent) of those said they experienced emotional abuse such as the use of fear, intimidation, bullying and humiliation. Over half (56.6 per cent) told Commissioners they experienced physical abuse, such as being beaten and slapped. Almost one in five (17.7 per cent) said they witnessed the abuse of others and 12.4 per cent said they had been neglected. Just over one in 10 (11.5 per cent) said they were forced into child labour.

## Grooming

Over one in five survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who discussed the type of abuse they experienced told Commissioners that perpetrators groomed them for sexual abuse. Several described a pattern of grooming where the perpetrator gradually built a trusting relationship with them prior to the sexual abuse.

As with many other survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often talked to Commissioners about the central role that religious institutions had played in their lives as children. They spoke about the leaders of these institutions, the positions of power and authority they held and the loyalty and respect they received from the communities they served. Sometimes, survivors also talked about people in religious ministry who abused their power and authority to groom victims. Survivors described these people as taking advantage of their high standing in their community to spend time alone with victims, make them feel special and to build trust. Other survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds said that the perpetrator had groomed their families under the guise of providing spiritual guidance and pastoral care. These survivors often felt that their families' social isolation made them vulnerable to these behaviours.

'Alberto' told the Commissioner he was 11 when he came to Australia with his family.<sup>425</sup> His family were devout Catholics and held the clergy in high esteem. 'Alberto's' parents 'gave up a lot to live a life of Christian values and to come to a country where it was safe to be a Christian'.<sup>426</sup> From the time he arrived at his new Catholic school in Sydney, 'Alberto' said that he was bullied and called racist names by other students. He told the Commissioner that when 'Father Lloyd' took him aside to give him extra tutoring, the perceived act of kindness was a welcome relief. 'Alberto' said he initially found the attention affirming but as time progressed, 'Father Lloyd's' contact became more physical and intimidating and went from touching and groping to rape. For a period of three years, 'Alberto' said he was repeatedly raped by 'Father Lloyd'. 'Alberto' described how 'Father Lloyd' gradually established trust by appearing to be caring and concerned about his welfare, then used his knowledge of 'Alberto's' family circumstances to silence him:

This was before he started doing things. This is just when he was getting information about what my home life was like and what my school life was like. So he knew my mother had a drinking and prescribed medication problem. He knew my father was working really hard to have a second go at being a success. He actually said to not to tell them about the time he and I were spending together because it would hurt them.<sup>427</sup>

Volume 16, *Religious institutions* discusses in more detail the reverence and respect shown to people in religious ministry by those in tight-knit religious communities and how this enabled perpetrators' access to children.

In their private sessions, survivors from all cultural backgrounds often described perpetrators as appearing kind, charismatic and popular with children and parents in the community. Some survivors said that they felt special when they were singled out to spend time alone with the adult perpetrator, and that initially they enjoyed the attention and felt safe. 'Rocco' told the Commissioner he was groomed and sexually abused by his Year 4 teacher, 'Mr Jacobs', over several years.<sup>428</sup> 'Rocco' described 'Mr Jacobs' as 'charming', entertaining and very popular with students – 'we loved the guy'.<sup>429</sup> 'Rocco' said he and his friend 'Eddy' began to visit 'Mr Jacobs' at his home. One time when 'Rocco' was about 12, 'Mr Jacobs' began fondling his genitals while he and 'Eddy' were watching television: 'I felt very uncomfortable, but still, I tried to put it in the back of my mind. Because he was a very likeable person, and he was almost becoming like a father figure to me'.<sup>430</sup>

'Rocco' explained why he felt that he was particularly vulnerable to grooming:

Growing up in an immigrant background, you're vulnerable. You're always vulnerable ... and you know that situation, the family life is deteriorating within your own situation. And then there's a teacher that's very likeable, and becomes a father figure – then you expose yourself, become even more vulnerable. And then when your vulnerability is shattered, at that level, then it's just a process of always trying to readjust. You're always readjusting with an immigrant context.<sup>431</sup>

It was less common for survivors who were sexually abused in residential institutions to say they had been groomed, regardless of their background. Some survivors described adult perpetrators who exploited the poor conditions and physical and emotional neglect in residential institutions to groom children. Often the strategies were quite basic. 'Maria', a Former Child Migrant, explained how she was given biscuits by the priest after he molested her, which 'was a big deal. We didn't have that much stuff'.<sup>432</sup>

### 6.3.2 The institutions

The majority of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (82.2 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused as a child in one institution. Most commonly, they indicated they were abused in a day or boarding school (35.2 per cent). Almost one-third (31.9 per cent) said they were abused in an historical out-of-home care institution, such as an orphanage, children's home or disability-specific residential care facility, and just under one-fifth (18.8 per cent) said they were abused while they participated in, or were involved in, religious activities, such as attending a church, temple or synagogue. More than one in 10 (12.2 per cent) said they were sexually abused as a child while in a youth detention centre.

Religious-managed institutions include a wide range of institutions in addition to places of worship –such as day and boarding schools, orphanages, reformatories, training farms, respite care and group homes. Close to two-thirds of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (60.1 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused as a child in an institution managed by a religious organisation.

Among those sexually abused in a religious-managed institution, more than half (57.8 per cent) indicated that the abuse occurred in a Catholic-managed institution. Just under one-fifth (18.8 per cent) said they were sexually abused in a Jewish-managed institution. Smaller proportions said they were sexually abused in an institution affiliated with the Anglican Church (7.0 per cent), The Salvation Army (3.9 per cent) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (3.9 per cent). A handful of survivors said they were sexually abused in institutions managed by other religious organisations, including the diverse Islamic faiths and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Almost one-third of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (32.4 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused in an institution managed by the government, and under one in 10 (8.9 per cent) said the abuse occurred in a secular or non-religious institution.

### 6.3.3 Adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours

Most survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (66.7 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused as a child by one person. Almost one-third (31.5 per cent) said they were sexually abused by multiple people. The large majority of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (91.5 per cent) said they were sexually abused by one or more males. Just under one in 10 (8.9 per cent) described being sexually abused by one or more females.

Most survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (68.1 per cent) discussed the age of the person or persons who sexually abused them. Of this group, 82.1 per cent said they were sexually abused by one or more adults, and 24.1 per cent said they were sexually abused by children.

Most adult perpetrators held some form of authority over the victim within the institution where the sexual abuse occurred. Some held multiple roles within an institution (for example, teacher and priest). In general, the Royal Commission recorded only the ‘primary’ role (for example, teacher rather than priest if the victim was abused in a school).

Almost all survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (95.3 per cent) discussed the role of the person who abused them. Of this group (noting that many were sexually abused by more than one person):

- almost one-third (32.5 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a person in religious ministry (such as a minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, Salvation Army officer, church elder, religious brother or sister and any other person recognised as a spiritual leader in a religious institution)
- one-quarter (24.1 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a teacher
- close to one in 10 (8.9 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a custodial staff member and/or a residential care worker.

Smaller proportions of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described being abused by foster carers (6.9 per cent), dormitory or housemasters (4.9 per cent) or volunteers or other adults attending the institution (both 4.4 per cent).

### 6.3.4 How children tried to avoid abuse

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds told Commissioners how they attempted to protect themselves from abuse or further harm. Their strategies and behaviours reflected those of other survivors who were sexually abused in similar institutional settings. Often, they said the abuse continued despite their attempts to resist or to protect themselves.

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds explained how they tried to prevent further abuse by avoiding the perpetrator or the situation where the abuse occurred. 'Rosswell' told the Commissioner that he used to help the priest at his local Catholic church – 'a sombre but fiery man'.<sup>433</sup> He said the priest would pick him up from his home and take him back to the church, where he sexually abused him. 'Rosswell' said he tried to get out of going to church but his mother insisted. 'Rosswell' also said that he tried disappearing from the house an hour earlier so he could avoid the priest, but that made things worse because the priest started coming earlier to pick him up. 'Rosswell' said that when he was 10, he told his mother that if he had to go to church again, he would 'shoot the priest'.<sup>434</sup> He didn't disclose the abuse but after that, 'Rosswell' said, neither he nor his family ever went to church again.

Some survivors said that they physically attacked perpetrators. 'Cleo' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by the local Greek Orthodox priest over several years.<sup>435</sup> As she got older, 'Cleo' said the sexual abuse became more invasive and one day, at around the age of 12, she just snapped:

He started to touch me, and something in me just – I broke the stick and I hit him. And I kept hitting him. He grabbed the stick and I said to him, 'Don't you ever touch me again or I'll tell everybody' ... He just looked terrified. I was empowered. I just saw red, I was so angry. I was angry with God, I was angry with my mother, with her betraying me, angry with the Church, angry with him. I wasn't going to cop it anymore.<sup>436</sup>

'Cleo' said she continued attending church and Sunday school and the priest never abused her again.

Several survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds told Commissioners they ran away from the institution to escape sexual and physical abuse. This was common among survivors who said they were sexually abused in a residential institution, such as an orphanage or youth detention centre. Often, the survivors said they were returned to the same institution and the abuse continued. 'Theodore' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused in a government reception centre after being made a ward of the state at the age of 11.<sup>437</sup> He said he could not tell anyone about the abuse so he ran away numerous times. He told the Commissioner the police would catch him and take him straight back. 'Theodore' said no one ever asked, 'Why was I running away? ... No proper investigation was ever made'.<sup>438</sup>

Like other survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described a range of other strategies that they believed at the time would protect them from further abuse, or from more intense or severe abuse. Some told Commissioners that they disclosed in the hope that it would stop the abuse, though others felt that disclosure would have no effect or may result in worse outcomes. Survivors' experiences of disclosure are discussed in Section 6.5.

## 6.4 Circumstances at the time of abuse

---

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who attended private sessions often described the social and cultural, institutional and family-related contexts at the time of the abuse. Some felt that there was a relationship between some of these contextual factors and their vulnerability to abuse, though others did not. Despite the diversity of the group, there were some similarities and common themes among these survivors' descriptions of the context and circumstances surrounding the abuse. This section outlines these themes.

### 6.4.1 Social and cultural context

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often described experiencing a sense of isolation as a child. Some reflected that this isolation may have increased their vulnerability to abuse because perpetrators initially acted in friendly ways and appeared to offer refuge from sometimes hostile social conditions. Others suggested that the isolation acted as a barrier to disclosure, so that as a child they felt they had no one to tell about the abuse, or that no one would listen to and act on their disclosure.

Survivors' sense of isolation came from three primary sources: social isolation as a result of racism, discrimination and bullying; physical isolation from being geographically removed or separated from family; and cultural isolation, in the sense of 'not fitting in' with either the dominant culture or with the local communities in Australia that reflected their cultural heritage.

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and especially those who immigrated in the postwar era, recounted experiences of overt discrimination and racism from the broader Australian community. Survivors often told Commissioners they were called names such as 'wog' and 'dago' and were teased as children.<sup>439</sup> They said that school was not always a safe place, and many described being victimised by students for being different and made to feel as though they didn't belong. As 'Jansen' recalled:

I was called 'Kraut' and things like that you know, but by the time I was sort of third, fourth, fifth class that had sort of pretty much washed out. It started again in high school slightly, but it didn't sort of stick much. They were too busy picking on what they called the 'wogs': the Italians and the Yugoslavs and all that.<sup>440</sup>

Survivors told Commissioners that name-calling and prejudicial treatment also came from adults such as teachers. Some said they were humiliated or unfairly punished by teachers or excluded from school activities. 'Carmine' was born in Italy and came to Australia with his parents in the 1950s.<sup>441</sup> He told the Commissioner he experienced relentless bullying and racism from students and teachers alike. He recalled being treated like a second-class citizen and denied the same educational opportunities as some of the other boys, despite his father working two jobs to pay his school fees.

Other survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described being separated from family – sometimes before coming to Australia, and sometimes after. Several survivors in private sessions came to Australia from Malta under a child migrant scheme. Many of this group described similar experiences of trauma and hardship as children from the United Kingdom and Ireland who also came under child migrant schemes. The children, and the families they left behind, were often promised the children would have better lives in Australia, though when they arrived this was not fulfilled. Survivors from Malta said they received very little or no English language tuition and were generally given poor or limited access to educational opportunities. As children, many of the survivors missed their families and acutely felt the loss of connection to their culture and country of origin.



‘Tumus’ was born in Malta in the early 1950s.<sup>442</sup> He told the Commissioner that when he was 10, he was sent to Australia as a child migrant with several of his brothers. ‘I was told ... and I’ll never forget it ... I was told, “You are going to Australia to get a better education and to get a better life”’.<sup>443</sup> ‘Tumus’ said that when he and his siblings arrived in Australia, they were sent to an orphanage run by the Christian Brothers in rural Western Australia:

When I got to [the orphanage] ... if you were heard speaking Maltese, you got belted. But at the same time, nobody sat me down and said ‘Today, we’re gonna learn English’. They just stuck me in school and that was it.<sup>444</sup>

Other survivors lived with their families but described a sense of cultural isolation – of being caught between two cultures and feeling like they did not belong to, or were not accepted by, either. Those born in Australia as well as those who immigrated as small children believed they experienced racism and discrimination in Australia because they looked, and sometimes sounded, different. ‘Alessandro’ was born in the mid-1960s into an Italian family and grew up in Melbourne.<sup>445</sup> ‘Alessandro’ said he felt like he belonged to two cultures, but didn’t fit easily into either. He told the Commissioner, ‘my mentality is Australian’, but he also described how he was relentlessly bullied for being Italian and different.<sup>446</sup>

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often spoke of the isolation their families experienced after immigrating to a new country where the language and culture were very different to what they were familiar with. The process of resettling in a new country was difficult, even traumatic, for many families. Survivors and their parents often had limited English when they first arrived in Australia and many left family and friends in their home countries. ‘Arlo’ and his family immigrated to Australia from Italy in the early 1950s when he was an infant.<sup>447</sup> He said his mother felt very isolated and lonely and ‘got very sick’ soon after they arrived. As ‘Arlo’ explained, ‘It wasn’t a very good environment for my mother, who’d come from a small village, to this place where she didn’t have many friends, and she couldn’t speak the language’.<sup>448</sup>

‘Arlo’ said his father had to work and was unable to care for him and his siblings. ‘Arlo’ said he was separated from his siblings and placed in a home run by the Sisters of St Joseph, where he was physically abused. ‘Arlo’ told the Commissioner that he was moved from the home and placed in another one run by the Christian Brothers. Although he was initially happy to have left the home run by the Sisters, ‘Arlo’ told us that his happiness was short-lived, as he was sexually abused by two of the Brothers.

## 6.4.2 Institutional context

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described the institutional contexts that surrounded their experiences of sexual abuse in similar ways to the broader group of survivors. Survivors who lived in residential institutions such as children's homes and orphanages often told Commissioners they had very limited contact with people or organisations outside of the institution. Many survivors said that the adults within these institutions rarely expressed love or compassion for the children in their care. Some believed that the staff may have justified their behaviour on the basis that the children were 'nobodies'.

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds said that looking or sounding different to other children in the institution made them targets for bullying and victimisation by other children, and sometimes by adults such as teachers. Survivors sometimes said that the bullying and name-calling left them feeling as though their safety and wellbeing mattered less than other children's. Some reflected that this may have acted as a barrier to disclosure after they were abused. 'Alessandro', as noted earlier, was the child of Italian parents.<sup>449</sup> He told the Commissioner that on the first day of Year 1, his teacher made him stand at the back of the classroom and face the wall. This became routine. 'Alessandro' believes he received this treatment not because he had done anything wrong, but simply because he was Italian. He found himself left out of activities, and on one occasion in an older grade, was made to eat soap. 'Alessandro' said he was later abused by a teacher and has never told his parents: 'I was isolated from all the children. Today I find it hard to connect, because I've always had to stand to the wall, and had to be away from everybody'.<sup>450</sup>

Other survivors believed that their reactions to the racism and bullying may have drawn the attention of adults within the institution, and that this may have made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Some said they reacted by withdrawing from other children while seeking out the company of adult perpetrators who appeared friendly and made them feel safe. Other survivors said they fought back against the bullying and name-calling, and were punished by being sexually abused by adult perpetrators. At school, 'Spiros' said, he endured bullying and racist taunts from his teachers and fellow students.<sup>451</sup> He said his teachers frequently gave him the strap and withheld education. When he was 16, 'Spiros' said, he was caught shoplifting and sentenced to 12 months detention at a Salvation Army boys' home. There, he said, the fighting and racism were even more commonplace than at school. He told the Commissioner, 'I was in so many fights ... Just people don't like you and calling you names and all that. And I was the sort of a kid that wanted to stand up for myself'.<sup>452</sup>

‘Spiros’ told the Commissioner that he stood up for himself against the bullies and that after two months, two of the Salvation Army sergeants and one civilian staff member decided to ‘discipline’ him for this frequent fighting. ‘Spiros’ said he was raped by these adults on four or five occasions. ‘Spiros’ said the men told him, ‘it’s going to happen every time you get into a fight’. ‘Spiros’ said he felt ‘backed into a corner’ – he had to defend himself from attacks by other boys, but fighting them led to abuse by the workers.<sup>453</sup> He told the Commissioner he had no one to disclose the abuse to, and even if he had had someone to tell, he knew there would be serious repercussions for him if he did.

### 6.4.3 Family context

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds told Commissioners that religious institutions had been critical to their family’s sense of connection to community. This was especially common among survivors who had immigrated to Australia with their families during the post-World War II period. Upon arriving in Australia, their families sought to establish a sense of community and a connection with their previous culture. Often, they turned to religious institutions. Some survivors reflected that the language barrier, cultural differences, isolation and discrimination they experienced may have increased their family’s commitment to and dependency on religious institutions. Some suggested that the person responsible for the sexual abuse may have exploited their family’s commitment and dependence on the institution, ingratiating themselves with parents and grooming victims.

Many of these institutions were the centre of tight-knit communities. ‘Yiorgos’ told the Commissioner his family treated the Greek Orthodox priest who served their community ‘like a king’.<sup>454</sup> The priest had christened ‘Yiorgos’ and his siblings and officiated at his parents’ arranged wedding. After his father died, ‘Yiorgos’ said his family were left very poor. His mother did not speak English or work outside the home and so, ‘Yiorgos’ said, the family turned to the Greek Orthodox Church for material and spiritual support. ‘Yiorgos’ told the Commissioner he became an altar boy a few years after his dad died, and the priest began to sexually abuse him. ‘Yiorgos’ said the priest was aware he lacked the same luxuries as his peers, so he gave ‘Yiorgos’ treats and presents, such as money, ice cream and once, a pushbike for being a ‘good boy’.<sup>455</sup>

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who were sexually abused in school settings often described a similar level of familial institutional commitment as those abused in a religious institution. They often told Commissioners that their parents placed a high value on getting a good education and held teachers in high regard. Many said their parents came to Australia seeking better opportunities for their families and saw education as a means towards achieving a better life. ‘Carmine’ said his ‘Dad went to Grade 6 and Mum Grade 3. That’s the sort of education they had come from’.<sup>456</sup> He told the Commissioner they came to Australia because they wanted to give their children a better education than they had: ‘Dad had a high regard for education and teachers in particular ... It was something he aspired to and he insisted on us. Education was very important’.<sup>457</sup>

Some survivors suggested that their parents' high regard for education made it difficult for them to disclose the abuse. In some cases, survivors felt that their parents would not believe them. Others thought they while their parents would have believed them, they would not have risked reporting it to authorities at the school out of fear it would negatively impact on their child's educational opportunities and achievements. In such circumstances, many survivors told Commissioners that they stayed silent at the time and disclosed the child sexual abuse years later as an adult.

## 6.5 Experiences of disclosure

---

### 6.5.1 Circumstances of disclosure

The majority of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (89.7 per cent) discussed how long it took them to disclose aspects of the abuse. Among this group, just over half (52.4 per cent) disclosed as an adult. A sizeable minority (47.6 per cent) disclosed as a child. Most survivors said their disclosure was intentional, with the survivor making a decision to tell someone about the abuse and acting upon it. Among the 81.7 per cent of survivors who described who they told, most said they disclosed to a person in authority within the institution (24.1 per cent), a parent (21.3 per cent), and/or the police or representatives of the criminal justice system (20.1 per cent). More than one in 10 (12.6 per cent) disclosed for the first time to the Royal Commission.

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who lived in residential institutions at the time of the abuse often described similar circumstances of disclosure to other survivors. In general, their disclosure experiences were often negative: when they disclosed as a child, survivors described being dismissed and ridiculed, being punished, or being 'listened to' but finding out later that the person they disclosed to did nothing with the information.

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who were sexually abused in non-residential institutions such as schools and churches tended to have a different experience of disclosure than the broader group of survivors. These survivors described how factors such as social isolation, having a limited understanding of sexual abuse, and a lack of protection by responsible adults impacted on their experiences of disclosure. These barriers are discussed in the sections below.

## 6.5.2 Barriers to disclosure

Most survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (60.6 per cent) spoke in private sessions about their experience of barriers to disclosure. Most commonly, these survivors described feelings of shame and embarrassment as preventing them from telling others of the abuse (46.5 per cent). One-quarter (25.6 per cent) said they had no one to disclose to. One of the key barriers for survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds was fear: fear of retribution (23.3 per cent), fear of not being believed (20.9 per cent) and fear of someone finding out (18.6 per cent). At our multicultural forums and stakeholder consultations, we also learned of additional barriers to disclosure for culturally and linguistically diverse survivors, including fear of police, fear of deportation and fear of being ostracised. These and other barriers for this group of survivors are discussed further in Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse*.

### Shame and embarrassment

Like other survivors, shame and embarrassment were key barriers preventing survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from telling others about the abuse. For some, the reasons behind the shame and embarrassment had little to do with their backgrounds. They were simply afraid of being teased by their friends. ‘Joseph John’ told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by staff when he was in a youth detention centre, and the shame and embarrassment had stayed with him into adulthood.<sup>458</sup> He said he was yet to disclose to his partner, parents or other family members:

I couldn’t really tell many people because I was embarrassed what happened and I would’ve got paid out [badly teased] – that’s the main reason why I couldn’t really tell my friends about what was happening.<sup>459</sup>

Others told Commissioners how their social and cultural environment made it difficult to disclose. For example, male survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often described coming from cultures with particularly strong expectations of men and masculinity. Expressions of emotion were perceived as ‘weakness’ and expressions of sexuality stigmatised. ‘Theodore’ migrated to Australia from Eastern Europe.<sup>460</sup> He said he was first sexually abused in a government reception centre while awaiting a longer-term placement. ‘Theodore’ said he felt traumatised, guilty and deeply ashamed about what happened to him and could not tell anyone:

It would be very hard for me to try and capture it in words, but you can be assured that somebody from my ethnic background, you know ... A man’s a man, type of thing, and this sort of thing was – well, you certainly didn’t talk about it.<sup>461</sup>

Like other survivors across all private sessions, some said that expectations around masculinity were in the context of a broader taboo against discussing difficult or sensitive topics with parents. This was especially the case for male survivors who had a traditional and conservative upbringing and felt pressured to live up to their parents' expectations of what constitutes 'a good son' and how a good son should act. To contemplate doing anything that might cast shame and embarrassment on the family was just too hard. 'Asad' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by an older boy throughout primary school.<sup>462</sup> He, too, said there was no way he would ever tell his parents and acted to protect them. 'Asad' told the Commissioner he loved his parents, especially his father – 'He's my rock' – but the shock and the embarrassment would be too much for him.<sup>463</sup>

## Fear

Fear tended to operate differently for survivors who were sexually abused in residential settings compared with non-residential settings. In this respect, there was little difference between survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and other survivors. Survivors who were living in residential settings at the time of the abuse described feeling scared of physical and emotional abuse following disclosure. They described institutional contexts where children were frequently physically abused for minor breaches of institutional rules, and punishment was a very likely outcome if the child spoke out against the institution. In most cases, survivors said they had no access to a protective, responsible adult and so had no one to disclose to anyway. 'Spiros', as mentioned earlier in the chapter, told the Commissioner he was raped by a group of men from a Salvation Army boys' home on a number of occasions as punishment for fighting with other children.<sup>464</sup> He told the Commissioner he was afraid of the repercussions of disclosing the abuse:

the first time it happened I was devastated ... I said to myself 'How could this happen like this? Who are they, the mongrels, doing things like that?' I was furious. And I said to myself, 'Who could I tell?' But I can't go and tell anybody that works there with them because they're only gonna get back and that's gonna make it worse.<sup>465</sup>

In contrast, survivors who lived with their family at the time of the abuse were more likely to report that they did not disclose because their parents held the institution and the perpetrator in high regard. Many survivors said that their parents had risked a lot – sometimes their lives – to come to Australia, and that they felt very connected and loyal to the religious or cultural institution that had offered them support during their early years in the country. Others said that their parents regarded education as a way out of the poverty and disadvantage that they had known as recent migrants. Many of these survivors said their parents would not have believed them because the suggestion that a member of a highly-esteemed institution could sexually abuse a child would appear improbable or impossible to them. Others told Commissioners that they feared being punished for telling lies. 'Carmine' told the Commissioner his parents set up a home studio to encourage his interest in art and employed one of his

teachers, 'Mr Forsythe', to privately tutor him.<sup>466</sup> 'Carmine' said 'Mr Forsythe' sexually abused him in the studio over a two-year period. 'Carmine' told the Commissioner he was unable to tell his parents about the abuse because of his father's high regard for teachers:

I didn't feel I could talk to him about issues because he had the mentality that the teacher is correct. If you come home and tell him things then you'll get double punishment. He trusted the institution, trusted teachers, and naively so.<sup>467</sup>

## Understanding and communication

Many survivors' experiences of disclosing, or being unable to disclose, child sexual abuse were affected by whether or not they had someone to tell and whether they were able to verbally express what was happening to them. Like many survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds explained to Commissioners they knew what was happening was wrong but were unable to describe or speak about it. 'Angie' said that following the abuse she was able to disclose to her teacher.<sup>468</sup> However, she was unable to tell her mother because she did not know how to say the words 'penis and vagina' in her first language.

Others only understood child sexual abuse later in life. In the mid-1970s, when she was six, 'Lucia' said, she attended English remedial classes with five or six other children.<sup>469</sup> She told the Commissioner that although she did not realise that what 'Mr Constable' was doing was wrong, she said 'I remember ... feeling uncomfortable, but not knowing why it was uncomfortable'. In the playground, 'Lucia' recalled thinking:

'Oh, I have to go there again', you know ... We'd never say anything with our friends in the playground ... You'd just, 'Ugh, have to go there' ... I think everyone might have felt uncomfortable. But it wasn't discussed ... I remember I was quite reserved as a child and yeah, just ... I remember feeling uncomfortable a lot.

She told the Commissioner that when 'that Michael Jackson saga happened in the papers', she realised:

It happened in primary school and even throughout all my high school years it ... I didn't think anything of it. It was just until in my 20s when, I don't know, you just become more mature and you hear, you know, you read ... in the papers ... and you think, 'Oh, that's a thing'.<sup>470</sup>

## Protecting family and community

Some survivors in private sessions described the experience of living in a close-knit community and the silencing effect of everyone knowing each other's business. In many of these communities children rarely had a voice. 'Denis', who grew up in a small Ukrainian community, attended his private session with 'Marla', his wife and support person.<sup>471</sup> 'Marla', also the child of migrants, explained what it was like to grow up in a small community in the 1960s: 'Everybody knows everybody's business. If something happens it depends on who it happens to and how they're regarded as to whether that's listened to'. 'Denis' told the Commissioner he did not tell anyone about the abuse when it happened and had only told a few people recently. 'Denis' said that as a child, he would not have been listened to. 'Marla' explained that 'Denis's' mother was very involved in the Ukrainian community and would not have believed anything that would have brought it 'into disrepute'. 'Denis' concurred, telling us that he believed his family would not understand. He told the Commissioner, 'They think it can't happen ... It's a community, you know – we don't have these things'.<sup>472</sup>

### 6.5.3 Facilitating disclosure

Very few survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described situations where institutional representatives provided support to facilitate disclosures of child sexual abuse. Among those survivors who did feel supported, most described a situation where the institutional representative took the lead and asked them directly about the sexual abuse. Survivors who disclosed as children rarely told Commissioners that the person they told attempted to bring the perpetrator to account, or to block their access to other children. 'Yared' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by 'Father Michael', a Catholic priest from a nearby parish, when he went to stay with him to see 'how a priest lives'.<sup>473</sup> 'Yared' told the Commissioner the day after he returned home from the trip, he received a visit from the priest from his home parish. 'Yared' said his local priest knew something had happened between him and 'Father Michael' and insisted he tell him what it was. 'Yared' told the Commissioner that the priest was 'very shocked' to learn of the abuse, but 'Yared' said:

I asked him not to tell anybody, because I knew if he told my parents I will be in big trouble. Big trouble. I asked not to tell anybody and he promised me he's not going to tell anybody unless I want him to do so ... but he's going to try his best to see where he can fix it.<sup>474</sup>

'Yared' told the Commissioner that his local priest arranged a meeting between the three of them but that 'Father Michael' never turned up.

Like other survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often took many decades to disclose. As adults, these disclosures were often facilitated by family members whose help and support gave them the courage to disclose. Sometimes, survivors were prompted to disclose after experiencing relationship issues. 'Carmine' told the Commissioner



he first disclosed to his wife when they began to experience problems in their marriage.<sup>475</sup> As a young adult, he said he ‘could suppress things’. He was able to ‘get on with life’ and ‘just suppress it’. But after 10 years of marriage, working and raising a family, he told the Commissioner, his mental state began to deteriorate and he could no longer keep the sexual abuse he experienced as a child bottled up inside. ‘Carmine’ said:

I started disclosing to my wife because there were problems that rose up. So that’s when the disclosure started and she was very gracious. So it’s because of that relationship that gave me the courage.<sup>476</sup>

### 6.5.4 Responses to disclosure

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds told Commissioners that their fears and assumptions about how institutions might respond to their disclosure of child sexual abuse often proved accurate. Survivors expressed disappointment and frustration with the lack of effective action taken by institutions to prevent the perpetrator from continuing to abuse them, or from being free to go on to abuse other children in the institution or elsewhere.

#### Responses to disclosure as a child in residential settings

Like other survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who were sexually abused in a residential setting often told Commissioners that their childhood disclosures exacerbated the immediate impacts of the abuse. Many also said disclosure had failed to prevent further abuse. They indicated that there were few opportunities to disclose to people external to the institution, as there was limited regular contact with non-institutional authorities. Some children ran away from residential settings and went to police for support and assistance. ‘Tumus’ told the Commissioner he was frequently sexually abused by one of the Brothers at an orphanage.<sup>477</sup> He said he ran away from the orphanage when he was 15 and disclosed to police located 25 miles [more than 40 kilometres] away. ‘Tumus’ described the response he received from the police: ‘And all I got was a smack in the mouth and told ... “Don’t tell lies about these good Christian men”’.<sup>478</sup>

Survivors told Commissioners that a common response to disclosure by someone in authority in residential settings was immediate physical and emotional punishment. Sometimes the victim was accused of lying and sometimes not, but they were punished regardless. ‘Jarrett’ told the Commissioner he was 11 years old when he was first sexually abused in a children’s home by a staff member:

My backside was burning. And I went and I told the matron and she went off at me and dragged me to the shower and turned it on and held me there. Then she walked out – I didn’t know what to do. I was horrified, terrified.<sup>479</sup>

Some survivors told us that although they were not punished, they were offered no support, and no action was taken against the perpetrator. 'Wilbur Kenneth' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by the groundskeeper at a children's home when he was eight years old.<sup>480</sup> 'Wilbur Kenneth' said that when a nun asked him why he was upset, he pointed at the groundskeeper and told the nun 'he put his dickie in my mouth', but all she did was tell him to take a shower. 'Wilbur Kenneth' doesn't know if anything more came of this matter.

## Responses to disclosure as a child in non-residential settings

Survivors who lived with their parents and who were sexually abused in non-residential settings such as schools or churches tended to describe more complex responses to their disclosure of child sexual abuse. As children, these survivors commonly disclosed to their parents soon after the sexual abuse occurred. Their parents' responses depended in part on their families' sense of isolation and dependence on the institution. From what survivors told Commissioners, it appeared that victims whose families were more reliant on the institution for basic needs were less likely to be believed than other victims.

Some survivors told Commissioners that their families were socially isolated and marginalised from other parts of society, which increased their reliance and dependence on the cultural and religious institutions to which they belonged. In some cases, this was because the family held religious beliefs that prohibited extensive contact with people and organisations not affiliated with the religion. In others, the family were recent migrants to Australia, did not fluently speak English and depended on the institution to provide advice, information, social and emotional support, and in some cases, financial assistance. Many survivors in this situation experienced negative responses including severe punishment from family when they tried to disclose. 'Yiorgos', introduced earlier in the chapter, served as an altar boy at the Greek Orthodox Church and said he was sexually abused by the priest over a period of two years. 'Yiorgos' told the Commissioner that he finally worked up the courage to tell his mother and expected her to comfort him. Instead:

When I told her what was going on, she walked up to me like that, and I thought she was going to put me in her arms and embrace me. But she smacked me, smacked me across the head, and called me a liar ... She kept on referring to me as a 'pusti', which means 'poofter' in Greek. Ever since, every time she's punish me, she'd call me that.<sup>481</sup>

Other survivors said their parents believed them but took no further action when they disclosed. Some said their parents had told them to stay silent and not to tell anyone else about the abuse, which survivors believed was because their parents feared possible repercussions from the institution or the perpetrator. 'Cleo' described her family as a 'very traditional and patriarchal household, existing almost entirely within the Greek community – no outsiders were allowed'.<sup>482</sup> She did not speak English until she started primary school. She told the Commissioner that she and her sister attended Sunday school after church where the local

priest sexually abused them for many years, often forcing them to watch each other being touched by him. When 'Cleo' was 12 years old, she and her sister told their mother about what the priest was doing. 'Cleo' said her mother believed them immediately, but did not seem surprised or shocked. 'Cleo' said it was like her mother knew about the abuse already. Her mother then told 'Cleo' she must be quiet about it, or she would be in trouble. She then gave her a 'hiding' and made 'Cleo' and her sister go back to Sunday school. 'Cleo' left home at 19, and told the Commissioner that her mother maintained contact with the priest until he died.<sup>483</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners that their parents took action to prevent further sexual abuse, but chose not to report the abuse that had already occurred to the institution or authorities. 'Zita' attended a private session with the support of her mother and sister, 'Sophia'.<sup>484</sup> 'Zita' told the Commissioner her parents were Italian migrants who settled in Melbourne after World War II. She explained how Catholicism was at the heart of family life – 'it didn't really matter that money was tight ... What united us all was our attendance at school under the banner of Catholicism'.<sup>485</sup> 'Zita' told the Commissioner she and her sister were sexually abused by the assistant priest when he visited their home one day. 'Zita' said she and her sister disclosed to their mother immediately after the assistant priest had left the house. 'Zita' said although her mother was 'horrificed', she wasn't surprised given what she knew about priests back in Italy. 'Zita' said her mother refused to let the priest back in the house. 'Zita' told the Commissioner her mother never told her father because she believed he would have gone straight to the parish priest and caused trouble. 'Zita' said her mother wanted to avoid any controversy because they were new migrants in Australia.<sup>486</sup>

Other survivors told Commissioners their parents did not report the sexual abuse due to their previous experiences with authority. Some migrants did not trust police to protect them and their families. 'Toby James' told the Commissioner that in his early teens he got into trouble with the law.<sup>487</sup> He said he was sexually abused by a priest who volunteered to counsel him so he could avoid a conviction. 'Toby James' said he told his parents immediately afterwards. However, he told the Commissioner he did not think his parents reported the matter to the police because their experience in an occupied country during World War II had taught them to keep their heads down and avoid talking to authorities.<sup>488</sup>

A small proportion of survivors told Commissioners their parents acted to prevent the perpetrator from being in contact with them again. This sometimes included reporting the sexual abuse to the institution and to authorities. Survivors in this group often told the Commissioner that their parents were disbelieved or perceived as attacking the institution itself after making formal reports, which often had adverse consequences for their family's welfare and status in their community. In some cases, the family was ostracised by the institution and the local community.

'Zahara' said she was seven years old when 'Sheikh Saleem Hashemi' began sexually abusing her.<sup>489</sup> It was the 1990s and 'Hashemi' was a leader at the mosque she attended, and gave religious instruction at her school. He was also married to her mother, and lived with them. She said the abuse would take place when he drove 'Zahara' to school.

I started having night terrors, and displaying distress. So then I didn't want to go to school with him ... And then I told my mum, 'I'll tell you a story about why,' and I said, 'well, it's because he put his fingers in my weewee hole'.<sup>490</sup>

Later her mother saw 'Hashemi' stick his tongue in 'Zahara's' mouth when kissing her. 'Zahara's' mother then left 'Hashemi', and assisted 'Zahara' to report the abuse to the police. 'Zahara' told the Commissioner she was intimidated and frightened by the police, who warned her that she could get into a lot of trouble if she was telling lies. 'Zahara' recalled how the president of a Muslim women's group accused her of lying and then came to their house and warned her mother about spreading such allegations around the community. 'Zahara' said she and her mother then reported the child sexual abuse to the head of the mosque: 'We went to him and he said, "Oh, you can't do anything about it because we need to have three or four witnesses to do that sort of – to proceed with anything like that"'.<sup>491</sup>

As a result of these responses to her disclosure as a child, 'Zahara' said she no longer felt able to speak the about the sexual abuse.

## Responses to disclosure as an adult

As noted, more than half of the survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds disclosed during adulthood. In many respects, their experiences of disclosure were similar to those of other survivors who disclosed when they were adults. Disclosures often occurred after a trigger event, such as the birth of a child or unexpectedly coming into contact with the perpetrator. Some survivors had positive experiences when they disclosed as an adult for the first time to family members. Often, these positive responses were unexpected. 'Carmine', who as outlined earlier was sexually abused by his teacher, told the Commissioner about the response he received recently when he disclosed the abuse to his wife, children and parents:

It was surprising how they responded, they didn't respond as I expected in a way. They were very understanding and not harsh at all. I didn't feel they blamed me too, which was a good thing.<sup>492</sup>

Like other survivors, some survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who disclosed during adulthood said they received negative responses. ‘Alessandro’ told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by a physical education teacher in primary school.<sup>493</sup> ‘Alessandro’ described how the teacher would watch him showering after class. He told the Commissioner the experience had left its mark: ‘Psychologically, this affected me’. ‘Alessandro’ said that he disclosed as an adult to several counsellors as part of ongoing therapy, but found it difficult when a change in counsellor meant retelling and reliving past experiences. He said he recently reported the perpetrator to police, and was told that what had happened did not constitute sexual abuse. He was also told he had to make the complaint in Melbourne, where he no longer lives. ‘Alessandro’ told the Commissioner how he felt as a result of the inadequate responses to his disclosures:

I feel that when I was a child I had no rights. And I have no rights today. That’s how I feel. And I’ve got no one to run to. I don’t know what I want. I want some peace – it’s like I want my life back – and I can’t find that peace.<sup>494</sup>

## 6.6 Wellbeing

---

Survivors of child sexual abuse often reflected on their lives both now and in the past during their private sessions. Regardless of their background, survivors described similar experiences of trauma as a result of the abuse, and its ongoing impacts on their lives. The majority of survivors said they had struggled at some point in their lives to maintain their mental health and wellbeing.

### 6.6.1 Survivors’ perceptions of their lives

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often described to Commissioners how the trauma of child sexual abuse and other childhood traumas have reverberated throughout their lives. Like all survivors, they indicated experiencing issues with their mental health, relationships, education, sexual behaviour, employment and substance use. Some survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds had thoughts of or had attempted suicide.

## Ongoing sadness, trauma and social isolation

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds told Commissioners that their adult lives were marked by social isolation. Many had experienced social isolation in childhood due to migration, language barriers and marginalisation from the dominant culture. For some, social isolation continued or re-emerged in adulthood. 'Arlo', as noted earlier, came to Australia in the 1950s.<sup>495</sup> His parents were unable to care for him and his siblings when his mother had a mental health episode and his father had to work. He was placed in an orphanage and separated from his sisters. 'Arlo' remembered lying in bed at the orphanage as a three- or four-year-old and thinking 'I'm on my own now'. He told the Commissioner, 'I knew it then, and I still know it today'.<sup>496</sup> 'Arlo' said that the hurt from experiencing bullying and racism as a child continues to this day: 'When I was a kid, I had a lot of fights, being called a "wog" and a "dago" – you got a lot of that in the 50s and 60s and 70s. And I still get a bit pissed off with it today'.<sup>497</sup>

Many survivors told Commissioners about the lifelong impacts that child sexual abuse has had on their ability to maintain close relationships with people, including partners and family members. 'Vittorio' told the Commissioner he was 'just a normal kid' from a very religious family before he was sexually abused.<sup>498</sup> He said now that he was getting older, he could see its impact. 'Vittorio' told the Commissioner, 'It's affected my whole life, you know? ... And it happened a lifetime ago'.<sup>499</sup> 'Vittorio' explained that following the abuse, he had stopped having close relationships with others and distanced himself from his family. When he was in his forties, 'Vittorio' told the Commissioner, he met 'Joanne' and they started a serious relationship. Following a rocky patch, they went to see a counsellor where he disclosed the abuse. 'Vittorio' said his relationship with 'Joanne' has since ended but they remain friends. Reflecting on his life, 'Vittorio' said, 'I still haven't got a lot of friends and I spend most of my time alone'.<sup>500</sup>

## Lost childhoods, identity, lives and discrimination

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often said their childhood experiences of discrimination, disclosure and responses to the abuse affected how they viewed their lives. Many felt they had lost a part of themselves. Survivors said their faith, trust, childhood, identity and innocence had been stolen. Some discussed trying to recapture or find the broken or fragmented child from their past.

Adult survivors explained that their childhoods were shaped by the social attitudes toward migrants at the time of the abuse. Their relationship with the perpetrator and the institution, who they could tell, and how those people reacted, all affected their lives. 'Cleo' explained that there was a 'demarcation point' between the Greek Orthodox culture at church and home and the culture at school where they were called 'wogs'.<sup>501</sup> 'Cleo' told the Commissioner that the sexual abuse by the parish priest 'stole her life', her faith in God and her faith in the Greek Orthodox Church.<sup>502</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners that their sense of loss still resonates today. They described emotional abuse by perpetrators as continuing to overshadow their childhood memories and traumatise them as adults. 'Kevin John' told the Commissioner his family, who were devout Catholics, immigrated to Australia at a time when people of non-European descent were discouraged from entering the country.<sup>503</sup> 'Kevin John' explained 'It was hard to get in because of the White Australia policy'. 'Kevin John' described the racial abuse he endured alongside sexual abuse. He told the Commissioner one of his strongest memories of the man who abused him was that he refused to call him by his name and instead used 'racist little terms':

It was as though my identity had been stolen from me and replaced with something worthless, demeaning and degraded. Even today I feel self-conscious when I have to say my name in public. But I have a name and I'm proud of my name, and I won't let anyone else take that away from me.<sup>504</sup>

Other survivors had little optimism for the future and often struggled to maintain their wellbeing. 'Adib' reflected on a life in and out of institutions, including jail, with little support from family or the state.<sup>505</sup> 'Adib' told the Commissioner he had been 'in and out, in and out' of residential and foster care as a child after he told one of his school teachers about his schizophrenic and 'extremely violent' father. He said one of his siblings had died from a drug overdose and the other has served jail time for violent crime. 'Adib' told the Commissioner:

My life's that bad at the end of the day there's not much that can make it any better. I've lost my [sibling], lost my other [sibling to the prison system], you know, like, how can you compensate that? You know, people looking after you as a child and then turning out the way you have as an adult. This is not a coincidence that this has happened not just to me, but to my [siblings] as well.<sup>506</sup>

## Survivor accounts: Discrimination, disadvantage, youth detention, social isolation

Many survivors' adult lives were marked by mental health problems, self-medication through substance use, and social isolation. 'Darius's' story, which follows, demonstrates how the experience and effects of discrimination, disadvantage and sexual abuse during childhood continues to impact throughout survivors' lives.<sup>507</sup> Common themes highlighted by 'Darius's' story include:

- Communication barriers for children and adults from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds impact on their daily interactions with authorities.
- Shame and embarrassment, having no one to tell and wanting to protect others can act as barriers to disclosure.
- Child sexual abuse in youth detention may be one of the factors that makes some young people more susceptible than others to engaging in risky behaviour.

### **‘Darius’: A life course shaped by the experience of child sexual abuse**

‘Darius’ was living in a correctional facility in New South Wales when he told his story to a Commissioner. He told the Commissioner, he was the son of hardworking Greek migrants who arrived in Australia in the 1960s. When he was 13 years old, ‘Darius’ and his cousin broke some windows while attempting to catch some pigeons. They were charged with ‘malicious injury to two windows’ and attended the court with their mothers.

Neither of the boys had a solicitor. ‘Darius’s’ aunt spoke English and was able to advocate for his cousin, who was released with a caution. ‘Darius’s’ mother, however, could not speak English and had no understanding of the justice system. ‘Darius’ was sentenced to youth detention for a minimum period of six months. He told the Commissioner that neither the police nor the court system supported him or his mother throughout the court process.

‘Darius’ described being physically and sexually abused in youth detention by a custodial officer. He did not tell anyone about the abuse: ‘How does a 13-year-old tell someone? Who do I go to? I was scared. I’m ashamed. I’m embarrassed’.

‘Darius’ said that on his release from youth detention he struggled to stay engaged with school. He began to use substances such as lighter fluid, which he progressively replaced with harder drugs such as marijuana, amphetamines and heroin.

‘Darius’ reflected on his life experience in and out of jail. He never told his parents about the abuse, partly because he did not want them to think they were to blame, even though at one stage he did blame them. He told the Commissioner that it was only later that he realised that they were disadvantaged by language and not understanding the legal system:

I didn’t deserve that. I didn’t deserve to go to a boys’ institute ... It’s had an enormous impact. And not only that, I’ve had an enormous impact on other people’s lives, which I look back on now and I regret, I really do regret it.

‘Darius’ disclosed for the first time to the Royal Commission and hoped that his story may help to prevent crimes against children in the future: ‘That makes me feel so good today. This has been the best day of my life’.<sup>508</sup>



## Relationships with family and community

Many survivors, regardless of background, described the impacts of the abuse on their relationships with family and their local community. Some felt that they had been supported after disclosing and others found that the knowledge and circumstances of the child sexual abuse had created a wedge within families. Some survivors, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who had little contact with people outside of their community, were deeply affected by the abuse. Many felt that they lost their social and support network after disclosing the abuse and found themselves questioning their faith and community.

‘Zahara’, who was mentioned earlier, said her mother believed her when she told her she had been sexually abused.<sup>509</sup> ‘Zahara’ said she and her mother received negative responses from some parts of the community when they reported the abuse. They accused ‘Zahara’ of lying, told her mother to stop spreading such allegations around the community and said they needed witnesses before any action could be taken. ‘Zahara’ said the abuse and the lack of support from her community has had long-lasting impacts. Her education ‘took a bit of a back seat to just coping’ and her relationship with her mother suffered.<sup>510</sup> ‘Zahara’ left the religion and experimented with drugs and alcohol. Having a baby helped her turn her life around, as she did not want to put the child in danger.

## Education and careers

Many survivors who had lived in residential care as children described adult lives that had been compromised by the poor standard of education they received. Some, especially survivors who were Former Child Migrants, said that the institution they attended did not offer adequate education – before or after the abuse. These survivors often told Commissioners that instead of being taught English and going to school, they were sent to work as domestic workers or farm workers from an early age. ‘Maria’ told the Commissioner she was eight years old when she arrived from Europe.<sup>511</sup> Together with her younger sister, she was placed in an orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia. Speaking no English, ‘Maria’ said, she was put to work as a domestic hand until she left the orphanage at 16. ‘Maria’ told the Commissioner she received no education from the nuns and in later years, struggled to make up for her lost learning and her lost childhood. At the age of 60, ‘Maria’ still longed for the childhood she never had:

I’ve got two jobs and I would love to give up one job because I haven’t got time for me. I want to learn, I want to play, be a bit of a kid. I can’t do that working 13 hours a day. I’ve struggled you know.<sup>512</sup>

Other survivors said they had difficulties concentrating on their schooling after the sexual abuse as they struggled to make sense of what had happened to them. Some stopped going to school to avoid the perpetrator. 'Gary Paul' failed his first four years of high school and then changed schools.<sup>513</sup> His second high school asked him to leave when he turned 16 and before he had completed his studies. As he explained to the Commissioner: 'I didn't listen to the teachers any more after that [the abuse] ... I was a bad influence'.<sup>514</sup>

'Gary Paul' found work after leaving school but he could not settle into one job. He said he still needs to be in control of all situations and his anxiety has been debilitating throughout his life: 'I've had a lot of jobs but ... about six months and it was over ... either I'd get sacked or I'd be telling them to piss off. The longest job I had was in a factory ... it lasted three years'.<sup>515</sup>

Other survivors told the Commissioner that they overcame their early difficulties and went on to finish school, undertake further education and training and pursue a career. Many were proud they had managed to find work as adults and were not the failures that perpetrators and carers in the institutions told them they would be. 'Tumus', who, as we heard earlier, was a child migrant from Malta, was, like other child migrants, denied an education and put out to work – in his case on a farm.<sup>516</sup> As an adult, he was only able to work in poorly paid jobs because of his lack of education. 'Tumus' resented the fact that despite all his hard work, he had little to show for it, saying 'I've never achieved anything because ... I can read, but I can't write'. However, 'Tumus' stressed to the Commissioner that he was proud that he had not fulfilled the destiny assigned to him by 'Brother Hall' from the orphanage:

Mate, all I've ever had is a speeding ticket and that's all I've had all my life. 'Brother Hall' said to me, 'You'll end up in jail when you leave here', and I swallow those words very proudly, 'cause he's wrong'.<sup>517</sup>

## 6.6.2 Sources of strength and survival

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described accessing informal and formal mental health support over the years since the abuse. In some cases, the support had been beneficial. In others, though well-meaning, it had been insufficient to appropriately address the survivors' complex needs. 'Adalene' told the Commissioner she arrived in Australia in the late 1970s as a nine-year-old with only limited English.<sup>518</sup> She said that she had been subjected to taunts and name-calling by her mother all her life – behaviours that she also experienced in the schoolyard. She said her father, the school cleaner, and her piano teacher had all sexually abused her. 'Adalene' said she felt that she was 'here to be abused by men'. She accessed support on and off for depression and over the years had worked in a range of jobs but few had lasted very long. 'Adalene' said she was recently diagnosed with a mental illness and was living in a refuge at the time of her private session, though said she had recently come to a new understanding and hope for her future:

The abuse that's happened to me, whether it's physical, emotional, psychological ... it does kind of strip at you. [But] I said to myself, no wonder you've ended up where you've ended up, and there's a reason. If I didn't have all these bits taken off me I wouldn't have ended up so broken you know, and now it's a matter I guess of me trying to put myself back together as much as possible.<sup>519</sup>

## Support from friends and family

Many survivors, regardless of background, felt that the support they received from partners and other family members was critical to their success in coming to terms with what happened to them as a child. Many talked about how the support often came in unexpected ways, at critical points when they needed it most or when they were most open to accepting help. 'Ivan Peter' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused and humiliated in a Christian Brothers orphanage in Victoria.<sup>520</sup> He said when he left the orphanage he was supported by a local man, 'Walter', who adopted other boys from the home. 'Ivan Peter' told the Commissioner he credited 'Walter' with guiding him back onto the 'right track': 'why aren't I a drug person, an alcoholic, a street person, a violent man? I can't answer that question. And I'm referring back to 'Walter'.'<sup>521</sup>

Other survivors learned through experience how to maintain positive relationships. A few said that they had developed a deeper understanding of themselves over time and had moved on to new relationships. Like many survivors, 'Wilbur Kenneth' told the Commissioner he initially had problems with close relationships:

I thought it was me, I thought, 'what's wrong with me?' I can't keep a marriage together, I can't keep a relationship together, I've got issues at work ... With age should come some wisdom, and with wisdom I've reflected to put it down to this.<sup>522</sup>

'Wilbur Kenneth' said he tried to address his problems and found support in 15 years of therapy, playing music and participating in sport. He told the Commissioner he directed his rage and negative energy into martial arts. At the time of his private session, 'Wilbur Kenneth' said he was studying as a mature age student, had remarried and was in a well-paid job:

It took me a long time, but I've achieved the things I wanted to in life. But the important things, that meant so much to me – I regarded myself as a failure as a dad and as a husband.<sup>523</sup>

## Mixed experiences of redress

Many survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds told Commissioners about their experiences with redress and counselling support schemes provided by different religious organisations. Few were positive about these experiences. Many felt that the trauma of their childhoods could not be compensated by any amount of financial redress, and survivors had different reactions to institutional apologies. Some, like 'Maria', thought an 'apology was meaningless really'.<sup>524</sup> 'Lotte' told the Commissioner she was raped many years ago during a stay in a psychiatric facility.<sup>525</sup> She said she has never reported the abuse to police and did not want to cause further distress by bringing it up now. However, she told the Commissioner she would like an apology: 'All I would really, really like at the end of the day is for somebody that was there at the time to say "I'm sorry that happened to you". It would make a hell of a difference to me'.<sup>526</sup>

Redress processes required survivors to relive their past trauma, which was difficult for most survivors. Some survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds felt they were unsupported by state and church-based redress schemes. As part of the redress process, 'Arlo' was assigned a counsellor and told he did not require a lawyer.<sup>527</sup> He said he met with representatives from the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of St Joseph, and found the experience very difficult as he had to repeat his story several times to different people. At the first meeting with the Brothers, he said, he was offered a modest amount of money, which he accepted, and an apology which he said was 'magnificent'. By the time he met with the Sisters around an hour later, he was emotionally worn out. He said he felt guilty because the nuns appeared to be frail, elderly women and felt that it would be wrong to take their money. He told them he would not pursue anything from them. On reflection, 'Arlo' believes he was manipulated in the second meeting and had needed more time to deal with his emotions. His view was the Catholic Church provided little support in the meeting, despite his obvious vulnerability after meeting with the Brothers.

Survivors frequently expressed feeling particularly vulnerable when taking part in redress schemes. Some told Commissioners that redress processes appeared to be about protecting the religious institution and not the survivor. 'Vittorio' attended his private session with 'Joanne', who had also accompanied him to a support group run by the Catholic Church.<sup>528</sup> 'Vittorio' explained he was bullied into talking with a counsellor he did not like. 'Joanne' said 'Vittorio' 'had been locked in a room, with me on the outside ... and then bullied'. 'Joanne's' view was that the counsellor 'was there to manipulate people into not damaging the Church'.

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds described the impact of child sexual abuse on their wellbeing in a manner that reflects the experiences of many survivors. The abuse and its ongoing impacts marked and shaped their adult lives in different ways, and the trauma stayed with them. Survivors rarely found redress schemes were respectful of the trauma of child sexual abuse. However, 'Gary Paul', like many survivors, wanted to believe his life would get better: 'I don't want to believe there is no hope ... I want to believe I do have a better life coming'.<sup>529</sup>

# 7 Survivors with disability

## 7.1 Overview

---

Chapter 7 describes the common themes that emerged from our analysis of the experiences of child sexual abuse for victims with disability at the time of the abuse. These survivors were sexually abused as children in a range of institutional contexts, including mainstream and disability-specific historical residential institutions and schools.

We conducted:

- qualitative analysis of a sample of 50 narratives written from the accounts given during private sessions by survivors who said they were a child with disability at the time of the abuse
- quantitative analysis of the accounts given during private sessions of 293 survivors who said they were a child with disability at the time of the abuse.

The analysis excluded survivors with disability at the time of their private session who did not have disability at the time of the abuse.

### 7.1.1 Defining disability

The Royal Commission's framework for defining disability is based on the understanding that physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are common aspects of human functioning.<sup>530</sup> We further acknowledge that an impairment, health condition or chronic illness can be considered a disability when environmental and personal factors hinder a person's full and effective participation in society.

The Royal Commission's approach is consistent with the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, which defines disability as an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions:

Disability is the interaction between individuals with a health condition (eg cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression) and personal and environmental factors (eg negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings and limited social supports).<sup>531</sup>

The Royal Commission's approach is also consistent with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>532</sup> Under the Convention, society and institutions are responsible for ameliorating the potentially disabling impact of unsupportive environments on people with disability.

## 7.2 Profile of survivors with disability

---

Of the 6,875 survivors and/or their family and friends who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017 to describe their experiences of child sexual abuse in Australian institutions, 293 (4.3 per cent) survivors told Commissioners they were a child with disability at the time of the sexual abuse.<sup>533</sup>

Of the 293 survivors with disability at the time of abuse who attended private sessions:

- the majority (61.4 per cent) were male
- 16.0 per cent were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors
- 39.2 per cent said they were aged 50 years or over, and 19.1 per cent were aged under 30
- one quarter (25.9 per cent) said they were first sexually abused after 1990.

The average age of survivors at the time of their private session was 44.8 years – 45.4 years for males and 43.5 years for females.

Further information about the people with disability who participated in private sessions is provided at Appendix R.

### 7.2.1 Disability types

During private sessions, Commissioners heard from survivors who as children had a range of disabilities. Some of the more commonly reported were:

- intellectual disability, such as Down syndrome
- specific learning disability, such as dyslexia
- attention deficient disorder, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- physical disability, such as cerebral palsy
- autism
- Asperger's syndrome
- epilepsy
- vision impairment
- deafness
- hearing impairment.

Some survivors with disability told us they required minimal assistance as a child, and others indicated they required considerable assistance and support on a daily basis.

A few survivors with disability indicated that as children they suffered from what, historically, were chronic diseases, such as polio or severe asthma. These survivors told us they often spent long periods of time isolated in hospitals, orphanages and boarding school infirmaries, which increased their vulnerability to child sexual abuse.

## 7.3 Experiences of abuse

---

During private sessions, survivors chose what they wanted to share with Commissioners. The majority of survivors with disability did talk about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced as children. They told Commissioners what happened to them, the institutions where it happened and who sexually abused them.

This section reports quantitative information taking into account the varying numbers of survivors who provided information about the different types of abuse they experienced.<sup>534</sup>

### 7.3.1 Nature of the abuse

Of those survivors with disability who spoke about their age when they were first sexually abused (87.7 per cent), almost half (47.5 per cent) told Commissioners they were first sexually abused in an institutional context between the ages of 10 and 14. Over one-third (35.4 per cent) said they were first sexually abused as a young child under the age of 10. On average, both male and female survivors with disability said they were 10.9 years old at the first incident of sexual abuse.

Most survivors with disability (90.8 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the frequency of the sexual abuse. Among this group, 86.1 per cent said they experienced multiple episodes of abuse. Among survivors who discussed the duration of the abuse (76.1 per cent), most (62.8 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused as a child for one year or less. About one in three (32.7 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused for between two and five years and 15.7 per cent said they were sexually abused as a child for more than five years.

Most survivors with disability (84.6 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the types of child sexual abuse they experienced. Among this group (noting that many experienced multiple episodes and types of sexual abuse):

- almost two-thirds (64.1 per cent) described experiences of sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact abuse, such as sexual touching of their body or being made to touch the perpetrator's body
- over half (56.5 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving penetration (for example, penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, another body part or an object)
- one in four (25.0 per cent) described experiences where their privacy was violated, such as being forced to undress in front of someone or being watched while showering
- 16.9 per cent described experiences consistent with being groomed for sexual contact (for example, behaviours that manipulate and control the child, their families and other support networks, or institutions, with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence, and avoiding discovery of the sexual abuse)
- over one in 10 (13.7 per cent) described experiences consistent with being exposed to sexual acts and material (for example, having sexual acts performed in front of them, having genitals exposed to them, or being shown pornographic material)
- 4.4 per cent described experiences consistent with child sexual exploitation (that is, being coerced or manipulated into participating in sexual activity in return for something such as food, accommodation, clothing, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money, or an incentive such as love, affection or safety).

Most survivors with disability (62.1 per cent) told Commissioners they experienced other forms of abuse before, during and after being sexually abused. Of those, more than three quarters (79.7 per cent) said that they experienced emotional abuse such as use of fear, intimidation, bullying and humiliation. Two-thirds (67.6 per cent) told the Commissioner they experienced physical abuse, such as being beaten and slapped. One in five (20.3 per cent) said they witnessed the abuse of others and 15.9 per cent described being neglected in an institutional context. A total of 6.6 per cent described being used as child labour.



## Sexual abuse in the context of bathing, sleeping and driving

Survivors with disability told Commissioners about the tactics that perpetrators used to create opportunities for child sexual abuse. These tactics often involved perpetrators taking advantage of children under the guise of conducting activities that were otherwise part of the perpetrator's role, or were considered 'appropriate' in the care of children with disability. Many survivors indicated that as children, they required assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing and dressing. These survivors commonly told Commissioners that perpetrators would join them in the bath or shower and sexually abuse them. 'Noel Henry' was born with an impairment that limited his capacity to walk.<sup>535</sup> 'Noel Henry' told the Commissioner that on the Aboriginal mission where he lived, the Catholic priest would sexually abuse him in the shower and sometimes in bed at night.<sup>536</sup> 'Noel Henry' said the abuse began with the priest touching him inappropriately and in time included oral and anal rape.<sup>537</sup>

As bathing was a necessary part of regular, ongoing care, sometimes the only way the abuse stopped was when the child moved away from the perpetrator and the institution.

Some survivors with disability were sexually abused in their beds when they were supposed to be sleeping. Survivors who had physical disability sometimes believed that perpetrators targeted them when they were in bed because they were unable to escape without callipers or other walking aids. Others were made to sleep with the perpetrator in the perpetrator's bed. One survivor, 'Jeanette', told the Commissioner that the school she attended as a five-year-old had a routine of making children sleep during the day.<sup>538</sup> She said she was chastised by one of the female teachers for not being able to sleep. 'Jeanette' described how the teacher would drag her into a room away from the other sleeping children and physically and sexually abuse her. 'Jeanette' told the Commissioner she could not tell anyone about the abuse because she was deaf and had not been taught sign language at the school. She said she often walked with a limp due to physical injuries caused by the abuse, which her parents put down to her being 'accident prone'.<sup>539</sup>

Many survivors with disability said they had been sexually abused in a car, bus or van. The perpetrator would create or take advantage of opportunities to be alone with victims, using reasons that were or appeared legitimate. Several survivors with disability told Commissioners that they had been abused when the perpetrator had taken them on a driving lesson or driven them from the institution grounds to run an errand. Others relied on taxis and buses for transportation between school and home. 'Clarice' attended a school for deaf children during the 1990s.<sup>540</sup> She told the Commissioner that, when she was 10, the school she attended hired taxis to drive her and two other children to and from school each morning and afternoon. 'Clarice' was always the last one to be dropped off by the driver. She said that during the time when they were alone together, the driver would grope and grab her and force her to touch his groin while he was driving.<sup>541</sup>

## Physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect

A total of 79.7 per cent of survivors with disability who provided information about other forms of abuse they experienced told Commissioners they experienced emotional abuse, such as use of fear, intimidation, bullying and humiliation before, during or after the sexual abuse. Many said adults and other children teased them about their disability and called them names. 'Lydia' told the Commissioner that the nuns at the orphanage where she lived would call her names such as 'devil' and 'filthy pig', and that she was labelled 'mentally and physically retarded' because she had epilepsy.<sup>542</sup> Other survivors told Commissioners they were laughed at and humiliated by adults who had a duty of care to protect them. 'Nancy' told the Commissioner she had a physical impairment as a child and at the age of seven, started receiving treatments at the hospital on a regular basis.<sup>543</sup> She said that while her mother would accompany her, the doctor always asked 'Nancy's' mother to wait outside. 'Nancy' described one occasion where the doctor had a group of medical students with him:

He would have me parading round his office naked, walking around, posing, 'Walk to there. Walk to there' and these guys were all sitting round his big desk guffawing and laughing and you're just a nothing. It's so embarrassing, you know. You dreaded it.<sup>544</sup>

Two-thirds (67.6 per cent) of survivors with disability who told Commissioners they experienced other forms of abuse indicated they were physically abused, such as being beaten or hit. Survivors with physical impairments often described experiences of abuse where adults in the institution would take advantage of their inability to physically escape or remove themselves from uncomfortable or painful situations. 'Angus' told the Commissioner that the nurses at one care facility he attended would bathe children in scalding hot water as punishment.<sup>545</sup> 'Angus' and other survivors described how children were left in wet beds at night, because adults who were supposed to be caring for them refused to assist them to the toilet.

### 7.3.2 The institutions

During their private session, survivors with disability talked to Commissioners about their experiences of child sexual abuse in the following types of institutions:

- disability-specific residential institutions that had been established with the explicit purpose of meeting the needs of children with disability
- disability-specific non-residential settings in mainstream institutions, such as disability-specific classes within a school that also catered to children without disability
- mainstream residential and non-residential institutions with no disability-specific programs.

Survivors who lived in residential institutions usually described being more physically and socially isolated from the broader community (and their families) than other children. They also described being more dependent on the institution for their everyday needs. Some survivors with disability believed their isolation and dependency may have increased their vulnerability to child sexual abuse.

The majority of survivors with disability (78.5 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused in one institution. A total of 34.1 per cent indicated that they were sexually abused in an historical residential institution, such as an orphanage, children's home or disability-specific residential care facility. One-third (32.4 per cent) said they were abused in a day or boarding school. One in 10 survivors with disability (10.2 per cent) said they were abused in a hospital, doctor's surgery or rehabilitation facility, and 9.2 per cent indicated they were sexually abused in contemporary out-of-home care, such as foster care, kinship/relative care or residential care. A smaller proportion of survivors with disability (5.8 per cent) said they were sexually abused while they participated in, or were involved in, religious activities, such as attending a church, temple or synagogue.

Approximately equal numbers of survivors with disability indicated they had been sexually abused in an institution managed by a government organisation (44.4 per cent) as by a religious organisation (41.6 per cent). Religious-managed institutions include a wide range of institutions in addition to places of worship, such as day and boarding schools, orphanages, reformatories, training farms, residential care facilities, respite care and group homes. Among survivors who indicated that they were sexually abused in a religious-managed institution, the majority (60.7 per cent) said they were abused in an institution managed by the Catholic Church. More than one in 10 (13.9 per cent) said they were abused in an institution affiliated with the Anglican Church.

### 7.3.3 Adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours

Just over half of survivors with disability (58.7 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused as a child by one person. Two in five (41.0 per cent) said they were sexually abused by multiple people. The large majority of survivors with disability (93.9 per cent) said they were sexually abused by males. Just over one in 10 (13.0 per cent) described being sexually abused by females.

Most survivors with disability (72.4 per cent) knew or could estimate the approximate age of the person or persons who sexually abused them. Among these survivors, 74.5 per cent said they were sexually abused by adults and 35.4 per cent said they were sexually abused by children.

Most adult perpetrators held some form of authority over the victim within the institution where the sexual abuse occurred. Some held multiple roles within an institution (for example, teacher and priest). In general, the Royal Commission recorded only the 'primary' role (for example, teacher rather than priest if the victim was abused in a school).

Of the 95.9 per cent of survivors with disability who described the role of the perpetrator who abused them (noting that many were sexually abused by more than one person):

- almost one in five (17.4 per cent) said they were sexually abused by a person in religious ministry (such as a minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, Salvation Army officer, church elder, religious brother or sister and any other person recognised as a spiritual leader in a religious institution)
- 16.4 per cent said they were sexually abused by a residential care worker
- 14.6 per cent said were sexually abused by a teacher
- 13.9 per cent said were sexually abused by a foster carer.

### 7.3.4 How children tried to avoid abuse

Many survivors with disability told Commissioners of actions they took to protect themselves as children. In the majority of cases, these actions did not prevent the sexual abuse from occurring in the first place, but may have contributed to it becoming less frequent or stopping altogether. Some used physical strategies such as running away. 'Angus' told the Commissioner that from the age of 18 months, he had spent much of his early childhood in a home for children with physical disability.<sup>546</sup> He said it was common for older boys at the home to sexually and physically abuse younger boys like him. 'Angus' told us that his mobility was less limited than that of some of the other boys. 'Angus' said he was often able to escape from the older boys by running away, but other children weren't able to run:

You knew who the boys were and when you saw them coming you were out, and of course I was first out ... I wasn't standing around. But the others – I know what I think happened to them.<sup>547</sup>

Other survivors described how they had confronted the adult perpetrator or child with harmful sexual behaviours, and demanded they stop the abuse. For most, this was not successful. A small number of survivors believed their actions did prevent the abuse from continuing. 'Albert Frank' told the Commissioner he had a speech disability and spent long periods in hospital as a child. 'Albert Frank' said his parents were anxious for him to socialise more, so he joined the Police Citizens Youth Club and regularly attended their weekend camps. He told the Commissioner that when he was 13, he was sexually abused by a volunteer club leader in the projection booth while films were being shown to the other boys.<sup>548</sup> 'Albert Frank' said he was confused by the experience. One weekend some time later, 'Albert Frank' said a boy came and told him the volunteer club leader wanted to see him up at the house. 'Albert Frank' told the Commissioner:

I went up to the main house and ... he was actually in the bathroom and I knocked on the door and I went in there and he's in the bath ... his penis was erect ... and he wanted me to hop in the bath with him, he wanted me to put my hands all over him.

I felt horrible and I said to him, 'I don't like this' and he saw my whole reaction to him ... He said, 'Well don't tell anyone or we'll both be in trouble'.<sup>549</sup>

'Albert Frank' told the Commissioner the perpetrator 'backed off' after that, and he could not remember anything else happening.<sup>550</sup>

## 7.4 Circumstances at the time of abuse

---

Survivors with disability spoke to Commissioners about the conditions and circumstances surrounding their experience of sexual abuse, including how they came to be involved with particular institutions. The circumstances of abuse varied, in part driven by changes over time in government policy and approaches towards the provision of care and support for people with disability. Survivors who were placed in institutions in the 1950s and 1960s in particular described being separated and isolated from their families and segregated and hidden away from society in general. They also described social and cultural attitudes and beliefs, family characteristics, family relationships with institutions and conditions in institutions that may have increased their vulnerability to child sexual abuse.

### 7.4.1 Social and cultural context

Many survivors with disability described a society where it was common and accepted for children with disability to be removed from their parents and placed in the care of an institution. This was most common among survivors who were aged over 40 at the time of their private session. However, a few younger survivors told Commissioners that their parents had been persuaded they would be better cared for in an institution. Many survivors said that their parents had trusted government and institutional authorities. Others understood that their parents were in a difficult position because they lived in an area without access to high-quality services for children with disability.

Survivors with disability and their families often spoke of an era when 'people didn't have high expectations of people with disabilities'.<sup>551</sup> Many of these survivors described being removed – often with their parents' consent – and placed in residential institutions that did little to accommodate their disability or provide educational opportunities. Some survivors remained in the institution well into adulthood. 'Carly' attended a private session to talk about her brother 'Denis'.<sup>552</sup> She told the Commissioner that 'Denis' was born with Down syndrome in the 1960s.

When 'Denis' was seven, 'Carly' said her parents accepted an offer from a St John of God Brothers residential home to care for him. 'Carly' said that 'Denis' was placed into residential care and sexually abused by several Catholic Brothers who worked there. 'Denis' remained at the home until he was 39 years old.<sup>553</sup>

Other survivors described an era where people with disability were 'out of sight and out of mind'.<sup>554</sup> For some, this meant they were segregated from other children, particularly when the institution also cared for children without disability. 'Tui' told the Commissioner about her experience living at a Catholic home for children during the mid-1950s.<sup>555</sup> 'Tui' said she arrived at the home with her four siblings, but was separated from them and the other children straight away. 'Tui' had polio and wore callipers. She told the Commissioner she was kept in a room far away from the main buildings of the orphanage, confined to her bed and not allowed to attend school or have any contact with the other children. She described how she was totally reliant on her main carer and abuser, 'Sister Ludwig', for her most basic needs, such as eating and going to the toilet. 'Tui' said she did not have contact with her siblings during the seven years that she lived at the orphanage and has not had much contact with them since.<sup>556</sup>

Sometimes, children were removed from their family without their parents' consent. This was especially common for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with disability. Prior to 1970, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children could be placed in institutions under legislation that gave the government the power to forcibly remove them from their parents. Many of these survivors received little or no education and found it difficult to maintain their connections with family, community and culture.

Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors with disability told Commissioners that the government had decided it was best for them to attend a disability-specific institution. 'Jameson' told the Commissioner that in the mid-1980s, when he was four years old, the government placed him in a residential special school for the deaf.<sup>557</sup> 'Jameson' said that at school, children were only permitted to communicate in sign language and were not allowed to speak or attempt to use their voices. 'Jameson' told us that the school authorities advised his parents not to communicate verbally with him when he was at home, but rather to sign with him, which was advice they ignored. 'Jameson' told the Commissioner that he felt that the school did not want him and other students to 'belong' in mainstream society.<sup>558</sup>

In private sessions, survivors with disability said they were placed in institutions that did not meet their needs. This was especially common among survivors who as children were viewed or labelled as having 'behavioural issues' and were placed in institutions for children with profound intellectual and physical disabilities. 'Maxwell' told the Commissioner that he had been placed in a Catholic boarding school in the 1970s when he was eight years old because the teachers at his primary school were unable or unwilling to deal with the 'difficult behaviours' he exhibited as a result of his hyperactivity and dyslexia.<sup>559</sup> When he arrived at the boarding school, 'Maxwell' discovered that many of his classmates faced far more complex challenges: some had intellectual and/or physical disability.

‘Maxwell’ described how he and many other children at the school were sexually, physically and emotionally abused by the Catholic Brothers and often witnessed one another being abused. ‘Maxwell’ said that at the age of 11, he was moved to a local primary school. After one year of high school, he left school altogether and he says he had experienced severe post-traumatic stress disorder ever since.<sup>560</sup>

Survivors of more recent child sexual abuse also described being placed in institutions that were not capable of providing adequate services to support children with disability. Many believed this was due to a shortage of more appropriate providers. ‘Helen Christine’ told the Commissioner that her son ‘Robert’ had been placed in a residential care facility because of the ‘angry outbursts’ he displayed as a result of his autism.<sup>561</sup> ‘Helen Christine’ said she later discovered that the care facility did not cater to children with disability and that ‘Robert’ was the only child with disability in the home. ‘Helen Christine’ told the Commissioner that an older male at the home had tried to rape ‘Robert’, and that she believed ‘Robert’s’ disability may have made him a target for abuse. She said no one had ever explained why ‘Robert’ was placed in that particular facility, except to say ‘no other accommodation was available’.<sup>562</sup>

## 7.4.2 Institutional context

Survivors with disability often told Commissioners about conditions within institutions that they believed may have facilitated the sexual abuse. These conditions included inadequate supervision of children and staff, a lack of external monitoring and oversight, and organisational cultures that did not value or respect children with disability. Some of the institutional conditions described by survivors with disability are consistent with those described by all survivors.

### Supervision of children and monitoring of staff

Many survivors with disability described institutions that lacked procedures, codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for staff that might have protected children from sexual abuse. Survivors with disability commonly told Commissioners that they were left alone in the company of sexually abusive adults. In most cases, this was on the premises of the institution. Many survivors described institutions where it was accepted and common for perpetrators to close and even lock doors to prevent interference from protective adults.

Other survivors with disability described situations where adults in authority, such as teachers and residential care workers, had taken them off the premises under the pretext of giving them a driving lesson or taking them on an errand. ‘Anita’ told the Commissioner that she was sent to live in the city at a home run by a disability service provider when she was five years old.<sup>563</sup> ‘Anita’ said that one of the staff nurses was permitted to take her away with him for the weekend and he sexually abused her during bath time. ‘Anita’ told the Commissioner the nurse asked her if she wanted to sleep in the bed with him.

'Anita' recalled:

I felt very threatened ... I was terrified because he had to help me to go to the toilet. I was his captive all weekend. I remember looking out the window and just wishing I could escape.<sup>564</sup>

'Anita' said the fear from that night had stayed with her. She told the Commissioner that she believed the institution had 'sanctioned' the nurse's abuse by allowing him to have such unrestricted access to her.<sup>565</sup>

Poor supervision was not confined to adults' interactions with children. Many survivors were sexually abused by children with harmful sexual behaviours on institutional premises. These survivors told Commissioners they believed this abuse may have been prevented if protective adults had been performing their duties and supervising children's interactions with each other. 'Lara', who has Down syndrome, recently attended a school for children with disability.<sup>566</sup> 'Lara's' mother 'Nadine' told the Commissioner that 'Lara' was crying and screaming when she got off the school bus one afternoon. 'Nadine' said that when she asked what was wrong, 'Lara' told her she had felt tired during lunchtime that day and had gone to the school's 'quiet zone' for a rest. 'Lara' told her mother she was laying on a beanbag trying to sleep when a boy had come into the room and laid on top of her, ripped the buttons from her school dress and put his hands down her underpants. 'Nadine' told the Commissioner that she had discussed the incident with the school principal who had assured her that 'Lara' would not spend unsupervised time with the boy again. Later that week, 'Nadine' said the same boy had cornered and locked 'Lara' in the library, detaining her during the entire lunchbreak. 'Nadine' told the Commissioner that the school had later informed her that the relationship between the boy and 'Lara' was consensual, and while they didn't approve, they 'didn't think it was much of a big deal'.<sup>567</sup>

## External oversight

Survivors with disability often told Commissioners that some staff from external monitoring agencies appeared 'tokenistic' when inspecting institutions. Many survivors without disability shared similar views. Survivors commonly told Commissioners that when staff from monitoring agencies did visit the institution, they rarely spoke to the children. When they did, it was mostly in the presence of the staff of the institutions. Under these conditions, survivors felt intimidated and believed the external monitoring agencies were not really operating in the children's best interests. 'Lydia', who has epilepsy, grew up in an orphanage in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>568</sup> She told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by older girls on two occasions at the orphanage, and physically abused by religious sisters who were staff. 'Lydia' said that 'independent observers' from the government visited the orphanage 'every now and then to check on the girls'. 'Lydia' said that the nuns always sat in on these meetings and she found it impossible to report the abuse under such circumstances:



Having the perpetrator in the room, glaring at you, and the government representative opposite ... if you were asked, 'How did the nuns treat you?' you'd say, 'Very well'. You'd say everything in your own interest.<sup>569</sup>

Like survivors without disability, many survivors with disability believed that external monitoring agencies did little to protect children from sexual abuse – even when the abuse was reported directly to them. In some cases, survivors said they suffered consequences after they disclosed their experience of sexual abuse to external authorities, and quickly learnt it was better to stay silent. 'Shawn' attended a residential school for boys with physical and intellectual impairments, managed by the St John of God Brothers.<sup>570</sup> 'Shawn' said some of the Brothers were cruel, regularly caning up to 20 children at a time until they were unable to stand. Each week, 'Shawn' said a social worker from the Department of Education visited the school. On one of these occasions, 'Shawn' said he told the social worker that another boy was harassing him for money. Soon afterward, 'Shawn' said he was paraded in front of the school and ridiculed for making the allegation. 'After that, I knew I couldn't trust the worker', 'Shawn' said. 'Other boys told me that he [the social worker] told the Brothers everything.'<sup>571</sup>

## Institutional norms of abuse and neglect

Survivors with disability told Commissioners that sexual and physical abuse and neglect of children with disability was so widespread they thought it was just a normal part of being a child in an institution. Many grew up unable to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable forms of social interaction. For a few survivors, this had major ramifications in adulthood. 'Dudley', who had a mild cognitive impairment, told the Commissioner that sexual contact between staff and children, and between children with harmful sexual behaviours and other children, was common and openly acknowledged at the homes he lived in the 1950s:<sup>572</sup>

Girls used to sit on the attendant's knees. Where was the attendant's hand? You can guess where it was. We was touched too. They were teaching us the wrong thing and we thought it was the right thing. In those days there was a lot of touching ... I touch them because they used to touch me ...<sup>573</sup>

'Dudley' also recalled a man paying some children at the home so he could 'touch us up'. 'Dudley' told the Commissioner, 'When I got out of the home I started doing the same thing and it got me in trouble'. 'Dudley' had been in trouble with the law.<sup>574</sup>

### 7.4.3 Family context

Some survivors with disability told Commissioners they had no or very little contact with their birth families during their childhood. Sometimes survivors were placed in residential institutions as babies or young children because their parents were advised to do this, or because the family found it difficult to access support for a child with high support needs. Other survivors had more contact with their families whom they visited on weekends or during holiday periods, but felt a similar sense of isolation and separation from family and community. Survivors who lived most or all of their childhoods in residential facilities were especially dependent on the institution and told us that they had few opportunities to disclose sexual abuse.

Survivors who lived at home with their families often told Commissioners that they grew up in a supportive and loving environment. In general, they also described their parents as being very deferential and trusting of those in authority within institutions, and in particular within religious institutions. Many of these survivors had families who went to church every Sunday, had close bonds with people in the church community and were proud of their involvement in church activities. In family circumstances like these, many survivors felt they would not be believed or they would be punished if they disclosed the sexual abuse.

Other survivors with disability described the unquestioning trust their parents had placed in the medical establishment, and believed this may have increased their vulnerability to sexual abuse by doctors and nurses. Many of these survivors had extensive contact with medical and other healthcare professionals throughout their childhood. These survivors said their parents held doctors in high esteem and followed their advice without question in the belief that they had their child's best interests at heart. Several survivors told Commissioners that they had been sexually abused in a doctor's clinic as their parents waited outside. Others had been sexually abused when they were living in hospital while they recovered from illness.

'Jason Michael' described himself as a 'sickly' boy who spent much of his childhood between the ages of five and 13 in hospital.<sup>575</sup> He told the Commissioner that his mother accompanied him to all his medical appointments until he was about eight years old. After that, 'Jason Michael' said she let him go in alone, but with strict instructions. 'My mother always used to say to me, "Whatever the doctor wanted to do to you, do not stop him. Let him do whatever he has to do".' 'Jason Michael' said he was subsequently sexually abused by three different doctors and several nurses. 'Jason Michael' also described how the nurses often played with his penis to get it erect when bathing him: 'Two or three girls would come in and start trying to make something stand up, because I was a 12-year-old. And they'd try to get that, and then they'd start to giggle and things like that'.<sup>576</sup>

Some survivors with disability were sexually abused despite their parents' best efforts to keep them safe. One mother, who described herself as alert, informed, careful and conscious of the potential dangers of child sexual abuse, told the Commissioner her child was abused by a trusted person when she had 'respite days'.<sup>577</sup>

## 7.5 Experiences of disclosure

---

It was common for survivors, not just those with disability, to tell Commissioners they made multiple attempts to disclose the sexual abuse. Many described disclosure as a process they undertook with different people on many occasions over time. Mostly, their disclosures were intentional and rarely a one-off event. This was true for survivors with and without disability.

Survivors with and without disability told Commissioners that their experience of disclosure was affected by physical and social isolation, communication difficulties – such as not having the language to describe what had happened to them – and an absence of contact with a protective adult. Survivors often commented that institutions appeared ill-equipped to respond to the additional needs of children with disability. Many survivors believed that institutions lacked the knowledge and/or resources to provide the most basic standard of care for people with disability and this accounted for their mostly inadequate responses to disclosure.

Survivors with communication support needs and cognitive impairments told Commissioners they found it particularly difficult to disclose sexual abuse as a child. As children, they were reliant on adults to interpret their signs of distress. In some cases, protective adults did not understand victims' nonverbal signals that they were being sexually abused. In others, victims with communication or cognitive impairments were not believed, or their cases were not pursued through the criminal justice system, because they were viewed as not having the capacity to give evidence.<sup>578</sup>

### 7.5.1 Circumstances of disclosure

Most survivors with disability described the details of their disclosure in their private session. This section reports quantitative information, taking into account the varying number of survivors who provided information about different aspects of disclosure. For example, survivors with disability who did not provide information about when they first disclosed have not been included in the calculation of the proportion of survivors who disclosed as a child or adult.

Most survivors with disability (85.7 per cent) told Commissioners details about the time at which they disclosed. Among this group, the majority (61.0 per cent) told Commissioners they disclosed as a child. Two in five (39.0 per cent) said they disclosed as an adult. Most said their disclosures were intentional, meaning they deliberately used verbal or nonverbal signals in an attempt to indicate that they had been sexually abused. Some told Commissioners that they only disclosed after being directly asked by someone. The majority of survivors with disability (76.5 per cent) told Commissioners who it was they disclosed to. Of this group, survivors with disability most commonly told a parent (30.4 per cent), followed by a person in authority at the institution (25.9 per cent), the police (17.4 per cent) and a counsellor (16.1 per cent). A small proportion (6.3 per cent) told their story for the first time to the Royal Commission.

## Official records, witnesses and experiences of disclosure

Many survivors who had spent long periods of their young lives in historical forms of out-of-home care told Commissioners that they looked to official records to understand and make sense of their childhoods. Almost all survivors with disability who were sexually abused in these types of care discussed how access to records had affected their experience of disclosure. They told Commissioners they had sought official accounts to support their memories of their childhoods. Some had hoped that the records would help them to understand their experience of child sexual abuse. Others described looking for some recognition and acknowledgement of their childhoods and the abuse they had experienced: as one survivor said, 'it's me I want to find'.<sup>579</sup>

Survivors with disability often told Commissioners that their records were missing, unavailable or had been destroyed. Some said that records they had accessed had been heavily redacted, leaving little or no detail of their experience of child sexual abuse or of their childhood at all. Others had experienced difficulty in accessing records because it was unclear which present-day agency had responsibility for archiving the records of the institution where they were abused. 'Angus' spent long periods of time during his early childhood in a care facility for children with physical disability. He said he was regularly sexually abused by the older boys.<sup>580</sup> 'Angus' told the Commissioner that he experienced difficulty determining who was responsible for archiving the records of his time in care. He said he eventually discovered that the care facility he attended was classified as a 'hospital school' and that the Department of Education was responsible for archiving the records. 'Angus' said he received mixed messages about why his records weren't available, and at one point was told they had been destroyed.<sup>581</sup>

In some cases, survivors told Commissioners that the only validation they received of their experiences of child sexual abuse and other abuse came from other people's recollections, which often came many years later. Some survivors said they had been contacted in adulthood by people who had witnessed the abuse. Several survivors told Commissioners that they had been contacted by the perpetrator. Many found this contact deeply troubling. 'Mia' told the Commissioner she was born three months premature with a physical impairment during the late 1960s.<sup>582</sup> Family circumstances meant that 'Mia' was made a ward of the state when she was three and a half months old and placed in a boarding institution for people with disability. From the age of three, 'Mia' said she was taken on holidays with two elderly host parents and that her host father sexually abused her on many occasions. 'Mia' told the Commissioner that a friend of the host family contacted her when she was about 30 and admitted that they had witnessed the abuse. 'Mia' said she experienced flashbacks, was diagnosed with depression and has been taking antidepressant medication ever since. 'Mia' told the Commissioner, 'They knew about it. Why the hell didn't anyone do anything about it? ... I just got the impression it was the "done" thing and you didn't talk about it and everyone did it'.<sup>583</sup>

## Differences in disclosure over time

Survivors with disability described different experiences of disclosure depending on whether they disclosed as an adult or a child. Experiences of disclosure were also partly dependent on the social context and prevailing social attitudes towards people with disability at the time the disclosure was made. Survivors who attempted to disclose as children before about 1990 commonly told Commissioners that they were not believed when they tried to tell. In some cases, it was impossible for these children to report the sexual abuse because they were kept in residential institutions out of sight of other people. Survivors who attempted to disclose as children after about 1990 were more likely to tell us that they were believed. Survivors with disability who were adults when they first disclosed received a mixed response, regardless of when they attempted to tell.

### Disclosure as a child

Many children with disability who attempted disclosure before about 1990 found that disclosure was dangerous in the institutional context. Survivors' accounts suggest that children with disability were isolated from supportive adults, had few rights and were powerless to stop or even report the sexual abuse. The majority of those who disclosed or attempted to disclose at the time of the abuse told Commissioners that institutional authorities and other adults did not act to protect the victim from further harm. Responses to disclosures frequently included being dismissed, disbelieved and punished.

Survivors told us that punishment was especially common in residential institutions, where they rarely had access to a supportive or protective adult. They said that even adults who initially appeared to be acting in the victim's best interests often turned out to be unsupportive. 'Tui' told the Commissioner that she had polio as a child and was placed in a Catholic home for children at the age of two.<sup>584</sup> She said that one day she attempted to hide from the nun, 'Sister Ludwig', who regularly beat and sexually abused her. Another nun found her and 'Tui' told her about the sexual abuse. The nun said to 'Tui', 'I'll fix this'. Following the disclosure, 'Tui' said she received another 'frenzied' beating from 'Sister Ludwig' and the sexual abuse continued.<sup>585</sup>

Several survivors persisted in disclosing the sexual abuse despite being disbelieved, ignored or punished. These survivors commonly told Commissioners they were known among institutional staff as 'troublemakers' and were actively prevented from disclosing to authorities. 'Will' is Aboriginal and told the Commissioner he was taken from his mother as a baby and spent his childhood in a number of Catholic boys' homes.<sup>586</sup> 'Will' said that when he was 10 he was moved to a new home where he was physically and sexually abused by one of the St John of God Brothers for over four years. 'Will' told the Commissioner he disclosed the abuse to a teacher and a female staff member, but neither of them believed him. 'Will' said that on occasions when people from outside would visit, the staff would 'get rid of the troublemakers, the ones that would talk'. He told the Commissioner that during these events, he would be locked in a room or shoved onto a bus and taken to one of the other homes for the day. 'Will' said he kept reporting the abuse and was eventually transferred to a state-run youth training centre.<sup>587</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners that they sustained physical injuries as a result of the sexual abuse, which should have alerted authorities. They reported that in most cases police, hospital staff and child protection workers did not intervene on their behalf despite physical evidence of the abuse. 'Morris' had physical disability and said he was severely beaten and brutally sexually abused by his foster mother during the 1960s.<sup>588</sup> He told the Commissioner that he could not remember how many times he was in hospital for injuries from physical assaults, and was left with permanent scarring after being burned and beaten as a child. On one occasion, 'Morris' remembered, his neighbours had witnessed a severe and degrading physical assault and had called the police. He was taken to hospital and was later returned to the care of his foster mother. 'Morris', his schoolteacher, his scoutmaster and the neighbours all reported the abuse many times to police, he told the Commissioner, 'but [the police] did nothing about it'.<sup>589</sup>

Similar to all survivors who participated in private sessions, survivors with disability often said that their behaviour changed following the sexual abuse. They told Commissioners they relied on supportive adults noticing and taking the time to find out the reasons behind these changes. Parents often told Commissioners they learned about the sexual abuse by observing changes in their child's behaviour and then asking them about it in ways that were appropriate to their age and type of impairment. 'Samantha' told the Commissioner about her son, six-year-old 'Jordan', who had limited verbal skills.<sup>590</sup> 'Samantha' said that she and his teachers noticed 'Jordan' was no longer a 'happy-go-lucky child'. She said one of his teachers agreed to spend time with him during recess to find out what was troubling him. 'Samantha' told the Commissioner that 'Jordan' responded by pointing to his penis, mouth and bottom and then pulling his pants down in the middle of the playground. 'Samantha' said that she and the school investigated further and found that 'Jordan' was one of many children with disability who had been sexually abused by the school bus driver.<sup>591</sup>

### **Disclosure later in life as adults**

Many survivors with disability who had not disclosed their experience of sexual abuse as children, often did so intentionally as adults. They disclosed in different ways to different people over time – to family, close friends, police, counsellors and professional support workers. Some survivors with disability told Commissioners they disclosed as adults following a significant health or life event.

Survivors with disability often told Commissioners that their memories were triggered by public conversations about child sexual abuse in media reports and from hearing about the work of the Royal Commission. 'Rebecca' said that she decided to disclose after she saw a report about the perpetrator on a television program.<sup>592</sup> She told the Commissioner, 'I couldn't live the way I was going, so I either went to the police or I got over it'.<sup>593</sup> She gathered together her sisters, all of whom were also victims of the same perpetrator, and went to the police station to report the abuse. 'Rebecca' described the police as being initially supportive, and the perpetrator was arrested and charged. Since the arrest, however, 'Rebecca's' experience with the police has been less positive. She told the Commissioner that the matter has been delayed and is yet to go to trial:

The DPP [Director of Public Prosecutions] doesn't even want to speak to us. If we want to know anything we have to ring them, and mate they are used car salesmen, they just bullshit you. I just don't trust them. I'm sick of people telling me crap. The police do it, you know, they just tell you what they think you want to hear. And you get bored of being lied to.<sup>594</sup>

Disclosure as an adult did not always ensure a receptive audience. Some adult survivors with disability described the trauma of revisiting events of the past after many years of keeping it a secret. Others wanted to protect their families and not disclose the abuse. 'Nancy' told the Commissioner she was abused during the 1960s by her doctor as he carried out examinations which didn't seem to have any relevance to 'Nancy's' health issues.<sup>595</sup> She said that she was prompted to disclose after hearing media reports that the doctor's treatment methods had been 'experimental' and had been banned for use in animals, let alone children. 'Nancy' disclosed the sexual abuse to her mother, who at the time was dismissive and unsupportive. 'Nancy' went to the police, who she described as being initially sympathetic, but when it came time to take further action, told 'Nancy' that the doctor was elderly and that it wasn't worth pursuing. The specialist 'Nancy' had been seeing as an adult no longer wanted her as a patient, which 'Nancy' believes was related to her pursuing the matter with police.<sup>596</sup>

Some survivors with disability found that disclosing in adulthood had helped them make sense of the abuse. This experience was mostly confined to people who had received a positive or supportive response from the person to whom they had initially disclosed. 'Anita' disclosed the sexual abuse to a family friend, and explained that his acknowledgement had been valuable to her healing:

I told him what had happened to me, because I was haunted by it. And him saying to me, 'Yes it was wrong, yes you were under threat' actually enabled me to regain a sense of self, regain a sense of being able to control my eating, to put myself back together. Just having him acknowledge it, something had happened to me that was bad, I found it helped me to get over it, to heal.<sup>597</sup>

## 7.5.2 Barriers and facilitators to disclosure

Most survivors with disability (60.1 per cent) who did not disclose at the time of the abuse described their reasons for not doing so. Most commonly, these survivors nominated shame and embarrassment (31.3 per cent). Shame and embarrassment often led them to stay silent throughout their lives. Staying silent also helped to keep emotions in check and avoid reliving painful memories of the abuse. During the private session, many survivors with disability preferred not to speak about the specific details of the abuse. ‘Gerald’ told the Commissioner he had never spoken of his experience before coming to the Royal Commission.<sup>598</sup> He said, ‘It’s like a minefield that you close off because you’re terrified. I couldn’t put it into words’.<sup>599</sup>

Almost one in three (30.1 per cent) of these survivors said they feared retribution, which prevented them from disclosing. In many cases, adult perpetrators made threats to the victim or intensified the abuse if it appeared the victim was going to tell. ‘Ally’, who had an intellectual impairment and preferred to be referred to as ‘they’, was removed from their parents and taken to a youth training centre and then to a Catholic home.<sup>600</sup> ‘Ally’ told the Commissioner about being sexually abused at the home. ‘Ally’ said that the fear of punishment kept the children at the institution silent. ‘Ally’ told the Commissioner:

It was like living in hell because you couldn’t tell anyone. And if you told anyone, you were frightened. You were scared of what was going to happen. So I had to live with it for a long, long time.<sup>601</sup>

Over one in five of these survivors (22.7 per cent) indicated they had no one to disclose to. In many cases, survivors with disability said that this was because of the social and physical isolation they experienced as children – an experience that sometimes continued into adulthood. A similar proportion – 21.0 per cent – feared not being believed. ‘Rory’ told the Commissioner that during the 1980s, when he was 15, his parents sent him to a Catholic boarding school run by an order of Catholic Brothers.<sup>602</sup> ‘Rory’ described how he was violently raped on several occasions by one of the priests who was a teacher at the school. He explained that he did not tell his mother during phone calls home to his family because she was a staunch Catholic. ‘Rory’ said he thought his mother would not have believed that a member of a religious order could be capable of such depravity. ‘Rory’ explained why he maintained his silence for many years: ‘I just didn’t think I’d be believed and I didn’t want anyone to know’.<sup>603</sup>



Just over one in 10 survivors with disability (11.4 per cent) said they didn't have the language to talk about what had happened. For some survivors a communication impairment impacted on how or if they were able to disclose. In many cases, survivors said they attempted to disclose in other ways, often by changes in behaviour, but that adults misinterpreted these behavioural changes and reasoned that the changes were associated with the disability. Some family members told Commissioners about their loved one's attempts at disclosure that they only now understood in hindsight. 'Carly', together with her brother and sister, spoke about the sexual abuse of their youngest brother 'Denis', who has Down syndrome.<sup>604</sup> 'Carly' said that 'Denis' was in a Catholic residential care institution run by the St John of God Brothers for 30 or so years. On weekends home, 'Carly' said that 'Denis' had nightmares and exhibited sexualised behaviours. She told the Commissioner:

We saw the behaviour but we didn't ever link it to being sexually abused. And I think one of the issues is that people with disabilities, when they display those behaviours, it is seen as being part of the disability.<sup>605</sup>

### 7.5.3 Responses to disclosure

Responses to disclosure described by survivors with disability reflected the experiences of the wider survivor population we heard from in private sessions. Survivors with disability told Commissioners that although institutional authorities sometimes listened, at other times they dismissed complaints of child sexual abuse. Those who said they had been sexually abused by another child said that they were rarely taken seriously and that their experiences had been minimised by teachers, principals and directors of schools, respite care and disability-specific institutions.

Many survivors with disability said the person they disclosed to reported the sexual abuse to police. Most of these survivors told Commissioners that they were dissatisfied or disappointed with the response received from police. In many cases, survivors or their families said that they were told the police would not pursue criminal charges because the victim was not a 'credible witness'. This was most common when the child or adult survivor had an intellectual disability or was nonverbal.

Some survivors with disability, supported by their family and carers, told Commissioners that they had been dismissed when they tried to tell police about their experience of sexual abuse. 'Tommy' told the Commissioner the police's initial response was to say, 'It was a long time ago', when he went to tell them about his experience by a particularly violent perpetrator at a Catholic-run boys' home.<sup>606</sup> 'Tommy's' support person indicated that the police started to take 'Tommy' seriously after they realised how many victims this one perpetrator had sexually abused. She told the Commissioner: 'Every time they [the police] went to interview a witness, they ended up with a victim.'<sup>607</sup> 'Tommy' told the Commissioner that he learnt the perpetrator lives elsewhere. He said, 'Someone should go there and tranquilise him, stick him in a sack, one of those animal cages, bring him back'.<sup>608</sup>

## Survivor accounts: Consequences of police inaction to disclosures of sexual abuse

Many survivors with disability described trauma that resulted from decisions by police not to pursue their reports of child sexual abuse and charge the perpetrators. ‘Gina’s’ story, which follows, highlights how the assumptions made by police about her capacity to give evidence are likely to have increased her vulnerability to further sexual abuse.<sup>609</sup> ‘Gina’s’ story highlights what we have heard from survivors about how:

- police have not taken disclosures from people with disability seriously, labelling people with disability as not having the capacity to give evidence or be a credible witness
- child protection procedures have not attended to family concerns or been focused on children’s rights
- not acting on a disclosure of child sexual abuse can place the victim at further risk
- the institution’s capacity to accommodate the survivor’s impairment at the time of the disclosure influenced institutional responses.

### **‘Gina’: Many disclosures and institutional inaction**

‘Gina’ had an intellectual disability and attended her private session with her support person, ‘Jackie’. With the support of ‘Jackie’, ‘Gina’ described her experience of sexual abuse after being placed in foster care with her aunt and uncle. ‘Gina’ said that she was sexually abused by a friend of her uncle’s and also by her older cousin, and that she was regularly physically abused by her aunt and uncle.

‘Gina’ told the Commissioner she reported the abuse to police, but they made the decision not to pursue the perpetrator. The police told ‘Gina’ she did not have the capacity to give evidence because of her intellectual impairment.

Because she reported the abuse to police, Gina’s siblings branded her as a ‘troublemaker’.

‘Gina’ said that the abuse continued, mostly by extended family members, as she was moved through many out-of-home care placements. ‘Gina’ lived in over 30 different placements and was sexually abused by at least seven men before she turned 18.

‘Gina’ said that over the years, her mother had stayed in touch and had notified authorities of the abuse on several occasions. In a statement she made to the Royal Commission, ‘Gina’ wrote:

I remember the abuse well. I remember [my foster father] would place me on his lap. At first he would start to kiss me. He kissed me on the lips and said not to worry and that he wouldn’t hurt me. After that he raped me.

‘Gina’ told the Commissioner that the decision to drop the charges left her without any support in the community, and other men in the community began to sexually abuse her knowing that the police would not pursue charges. In her written statement, ‘Gina’ told the Commissioner, ‘All of the abusers knew each other, so when they knew that the police felt I couldn’t give evidence it was a green light to the abusers who knew they would not get in trouble’.

‘Jackie’ said that ‘Gina’ had disclosed on many occasions over the years and that these disclosures had been documented in her file, but that ‘nothing had been done’.<sup>610</sup>

#### 7.5.4 Survivors’ reactions to what happened when they disclosed

Many survivors with disability described situations where institutions had not provided appropriate levels of safety, support and care in response to their disclosures of child sexual abuse.

Survivors living with and without disability who disclosed in historical institutions at the time of the sexual abuse said their disclosures were rarely acknowledged and institutions often neglected to protect them from further abuse. Many survivors told Commissioners that they were punished after attempting to disclose and felt unsafe in institutions with no access to protective adults. Survivors adopted a range of strategies in an attempt to protect themselves, including choosing to keep silent at the time of the abuse. Many only disclosed as adults much later in life.<sup>611</sup>

Like other survivors, many survivors with disability said they were ignored and dismissed by institutions when they tried to disclose what had happened to them. 'Will' said his experiences of disclosure, both as a child and as an adult, have been negative.<sup>612</sup> 'Will' told the Commissioner that he made repeated disclosures as a child to the institution where he was sexually abused, but was ignored. As an adult, 'Will' said he disclosed to police, but they told him the abuse happened too long ago and there was not enough evidence to build a case. 'It was like, "You're on your own, mate". That was the biggest insult ... I got so upset that I got the statement and I went out and I burnt it'. 'Will' said he was not impressed with the way the institution or the police responded to his disclosures of child sexual abuse. He told the Commissioner what he thought needed to change:

People are saying that the institutions have gotten better. I believe that they've only quietened down. The rats have gone back into their hole ... What I would like to see is an independent body that only answers to the government, not the churches, not religion, not anything.<sup>613</sup>

## Survivor accounts: Children with disability seen as unreliable

'Maxwell's' experiences of disclosure, which follows, echo those of other survivors in similar circumstances.<sup>614</sup> Children with learning difficulties often went undiagnosed and untreated during the 1970s and early 1980s and many were institutionalised or sent to boarding school. Typically these children:

- were isolated from parents and lived in boarding schools that operated as closed institutions
- were placed in the care of adults who were not supervised or monitored
- did not have access to protective adults
- were viewed as unreliable in giving accounts of their own lives and were accused of 'telling tales'<sup>615</sup>
- were viewed as less trustworthy than adults, particularly members of religious orders
- came from families that had connections to religious institutions and these families relied on these institutions to protect and care for their children.

### **‘Maxwell’s’ experiences in the 1970s and 1980s**

‘Maxwell’ told the Commissioner that as a child he displayed difficult behaviours due to hyperactivity and dyslexia, and that the teachers at the local Catholic primary school had difficulty managing him. When he was eight, ‘Maxwell’ was transferred to a Catholic boarding school run by St John of God Brothers. When he arrived, ‘Maxwell’ discovered that many of his classmates had severe physical and intellectual disabilities.

During the four years he spent at the residential school, ‘Maxwell’ said he was sexually abused by many different adult perpetrators. He described the abuse as ‘vicious’, and told the Commissioner that he was only one of many children who were sexually abused at the school.

‘Maxwell’ told the Commissioner that he tried to tell people what was going on, including one Brother, and was beaten for ‘telling tales’. He said that on at least one occasion, he was crying when speaking to his mother on the phone. ‘Maxwell’ said that the perpetrator, ‘Brother Clifford’, intervened and took the phone, preventing ‘Maxwell’ from speaking to her. ‘Maxwell’ said that ‘Brother Clifford’ told his mother that ‘Maxwell’ was lying because he was homesick.

‘Maxwell’ believed that he had been made more vulnerable to sexual abuse because of his family’s and society’s unquestioning respect for institutions and people in authority. He asked the Commissioner, ‘And who is not going to believe a priest?’

‘Maxwell’ said that, a few years ago, he started seeing a psychologist and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and a chemical imbalance in his brain. He now takes medication to correct the imbalance and checks in fortnightly with his psychologist.

With professional support, ‘Maxwell’ has been able to pursue police action and a private claim against the abusers. He said that the slow pace of the legal process has taken its toll on his mental and physical health. ‘To tell you the truth I’m all hated out. I just feel numb, I feel nothing.’

Still, he knows that other people are relying on him, and that’s why he doesn’t give in:

There’s a lot of poor kids that were at our school that weren’t physically capable of telling their story properly. There’s a lot of kids handicapped and stuff. So I want to make sure I tell it, because I’m one of the fit ones, fit enough to tell the story.<sup>616</sup>

Survivors who disclosed more recently also described inadequate and inappropriate responses to their disclosures. Many survivors told Commissioners that their disclosures of sexual abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours in school settings were not managed in ways that cared for all the children involved. Some indicated that the institution did not take such disclosures of child sexual abuse seriously – a response that was particularly common when the child with harmful sexual behaviours was also a child with disability. ‘Chantelle’ told the Commissioner that the principal’s response to her daughter ‘Daisy’s’ sexual abuse at a disability-specific centre was inadequate.<sup>617</sup> ‘Chantelle’ moved ‘Daisy’ from the centre following several attempts to address an incident of sexual abuse by a boy with harmful sexual behaviours. ‘Chantelle’ was concerned that the principal wanted to dismiss the ‘incident’ and was too busy to talk. She said:

The way I looked at it she wasn’t taking the welfare and the safety of the children [into account]. She was more worried about her reputation. It wasn’t just a casual saying. She raised her voice and I felt like it was a threatening thing.<sup>618</sup>

‘Chantelle’ told the Commissioner that the principal questioned her motives and appeared more concerned with protecting herself and the boy with harmful sexual behaviours than discussing how to support ‘Daisy’:

She said she wouldn’t be there and she had no time for me. She said my intentions doing this ‘charade’ as she called it, had gone from protecting my child to hurting her reputation, and I was a vindictive person. I was just trying to get justice for my daughter. I just cried. I thought, ‘I’m not getting anywhere’.<sup>619</sup>

Survivors often told Commissioners that knowing how to support people with disability when they disclose child sexual abuse was ‘too difficult’ or ‘too hard’ for mainstream and disability-specific services alike.<sup>620</sup> ‘Clarice’ lives with a hearing impairment and communicates using sign language.<sup>621</sup> She told the Commissioner that at age 17 – some years after the sexual abuse had stopped – she came to understand that what had happened was wrong, and disclosed to her teacher at the college she attended at the time. She believed that the teacher and the college ignored mandatory reporting laws, and left it up to ‘Clarice’ to decide whether or not the matter would be reported to police. ‘Clarice’ felt isolated, and asked her teacher to help her report to police. ‘Clarice’ found her interaction with the police distressing:

The police didn’t follow their protocols. They didn’t provide me with a support person. I was underage at the time. They used my teacher as an interpreter, which wasn’t practice. I mean there’s a conflict there in itself.<sup>622</sup>

‘Clarice’ believed that due to her impairment, the police put her case into the ‘too hard’ basket, saying that it was her word against that of the perpetrator, a taxi driver who had driven her to and from school for several years.<sup>623</sup> ‘Clarice’ told the Commissioner that the perpetrator was still a free man, and that she was frustrated that it was up to her to continue the fight for justice with little or no support from police: ‘It’s like why do I have to make the fight all the time? Why am I the one that keeps the ball rolling when it should never have happened? It should not be like this’.<sup>624</sup>

## 7.6 Wellbeing

---

Commissioners listened to survivors talk about their lives since the child sexual abuse and heard stories of pain, trauma and adversity. They also heard stories of victims' and survivors' resilience and determination to find peace and experience love and joy. Commissioners heard about what has helped survivors cope with the abuse and the way it affected their lives, as well as what has not helped.

This section describes the experience of the 90.8 per cent of survivors with disability who shared with Commissioners details about the impact of child sexual abuse on their lives.

### 7.6.1 Survivors' perceptions of their lives

The impacts of the trauma of child sexual abuse described by survivors with disability were consistent with those described by survivors without disability. Many survivors with disability also drew attention to the stigma of disability and their experiences of discrimination, which may have influenced their lives in ways not experienced by people without disability.

#### Mental health and wellbeing

The most common impact of child sexual abuse was mental health concerns for survivors both with and without disability (93.6 per cent). Many survivors made a direct link between their experiences of child sexual abuse and mental health. They told Commissioners that after the abuse they were no longer happy, or their personality or behaviour changed dramatically. As 'Ida' said, 'I've never been the same person after all of that. It changed everything. It changed me as a person'.<sup>625</sup>

Many survivors with disability described experiencing symptoms of severe mental illness, including sleeping problems, dissociation, flashbacks and stress. Some had been formally diagnosed with conditions such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Others said they had self-medicated with alcohol or drugs to help them block out the trauma of sexual abuse, although many had not.

Some of these survivors told Commissioners that many years after the abuse, sensory experiences could trigger panic attacks or other trauma. Certain smells, sights or situations could bring back memories of the abuse, leaving the survivor in a state of sometimes severe stress. 'Will' told the Commissioner he was taken from his mother in the 1960s and grew up in a number of Catholic boys' homes.<sup>626</sup> He said he gets particularly anxious around intoxicated men because the Brother who raped him was often drunk. He recounted the time his brother-in-law was drunk and had put his hand on 'Will's' shoulder. 'Will' became very distressed, 'shaking, shivering and crying in a corner'.<sup>627</sup>

Some family members of survivors with disability described experiencing trigger events that brought back memories of the abuse of their loved one, or of the institution where the abuse occurred. 'Marko' attended a private session to talk about the sexual abuse of his brother, 'Damian', who died in 2014.<sup>628</sup> 'Marko' told the Commissioner 'Damian' was born with Down syndrome and was sexually abused in two residential care facilities managed by the St John of God Brothers. 'Marko' said that 'Damian' was three years older than he was and had very little vocabulary. He also explained that they had a close connection and understood and communicated well with each other. 'Marko' told the Commissioner he thought of 'Damian' every day. He described how a particular smell brought back memories of the terrifying place 'Damian' lived in as a child:

When you walk in there's a smell. It's like laundry that hasn't had enough laundry powder or something in the washing machine. There's a smell that never leaves me. I don't mean never leaves me but when I walk into a place that's got it, you go, 'Oh'. It's a trigger right back to there and to St John of God.<sup>629</sup>

Many survivors with disability told Commissioners how they struggled to cope with feelings of anger, shame and low self-confidence following the abuse. Some said these feelings were exacerbated by the institution's responses to their disclosure. Some managed these feelings with the help of a counsellor. 'Leslie' told the Commissioner he was sent to a Salesian Brother boys' home by a magistrate when he was 12 years old in the late 1970s.<sup>630</sup> 'Leslie' said the home's director, 'Father Coles' would sexually abuse him when he returned from visiting his family on weekends. 'Leslie' would cry and scream and then be locked in a room until he calmed down. He told the Commissioner that decades later, he was still dealing with a lot of anger. Recently, 'Leslie' said he had started seeing a counsellor to help him understand and manage his anger and related issues.

Other survivors felt deep despair and hopelessness, which they believed had been compounded by not receiving the support they needed. Some felt despondent about their future and wondered how long they could go on living. 'Tyler', who thought he had 'ADHD or bi-polar or something' had been arrested by police as a 16-year-old.<sup>631</sup> 'Tyler' said that the police told him he would be allowed out on bail if he had accommodation. A man in the police station offered to take 'Tyler' in, and despite no check being made of the man's background, 'Tyler' went home with him. 'Tyler' said he was sexually abused at the man's house over a number of weeks and that he later found out the man was a convicted sex offender. He told the Commissioner that he believed 'by the time I'm 25, I'll be dead from it you know, just play on me mind too long'. He was deeply distressed and recognised that he needed to get help 'before it gets too out of control'.<sup>632</sup>

Some survivors with disability told Commissioners about the serious health problems they continue to experience as a consequence of the physical and particularly violent sexual abuse they endured as a child. These include issues with bowel and urinary functions as well as with fertility. 'Gerald' said that without a doubt his health problems were closely related to the sexual



abuse he had suffered as a child.<sup>633</sup> ‘Gerald’ had his first stroke in his late thirties, and two more followed. Now, in his mid-fifties, both his physical and mental health are fragile. He told the Commissioner that medical bills and ongoing treatment had cost him both his house and his superannuation. He was living on a disability pension at the time of his private session.<sup>634</sup>

## Relationships

Many survivors with disability told Commissioners that relationships were very important to them, although many had struggled to develop and maintain lasting and positive relationships with family, partners and friends. These survivors felt that this was because of their experience of institutional child sexual abuse, as well as other trauma they had experienced during their lives. They said they found it difficult to trust others, particularly men or people who reminded them of the perpetrator and those in positions of authority. Over half of the survivors with disability (54.1 per cent) said the abuse had impacted on their relationships with others.

Some survivors with disability indicated that their close relationships with family, partners and friends were important sources of informal support, though this experience was not universal. Some reflected that family and friends had been unsupportive at times, while other survivors didn’t talk about relationships or family at all in their private session.

## Family and friends

Some survivors with disability told Commissioners that they had difficulty forming friendships or described themselves as lonely. Like other survivors, some said that being sexually abused as a child had made it difficult to trust others. Survivors with disability who grew up in historical institutions often said the emotional abuse and the lack of positive relationships during childhood had made forming friendships later in life even more difficult. ‘Ida’ was 15 when her father had her committed to a psychiatric hospital because he did not agree with some of her decisions.<sup>635</sup> At the hospital, ‘Ida’ said she was regularly physically and sexually assaulted by other patients, including being raped. ‘Ida’ told the Commissioner that one of the consequences of the abuse and mistreatment in the psychiatric institution was that she could not form friendships:

It impacted on me being able to form friendships with people – I’ve never had a person I can ring up as a friend and say ‘come and have coffee’, or ‘come to my home’, or whatever. I don’t have that. I’ve never had a friend.<sup>636</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners how the child sexual abuse had damaged their relationships with family members, or said that their family were not supportive. Sometimes, the sexual abuse or the institution's response to it had exacerbated already frayed family relationships. 'Gina' told the Commissioner that she was sexually abused by several men in her extended family after being placed in foster care.<sup>637</sup> In the absence of any charges laid by police, 'Gina' said her siblings did not believe the abuse had occurred. They labelled her a 'troublemaker' and were angry with her for causing problems within the family. 'Gina' told the Commissioner that she had no contact with her siblings at the time of her private session.

Other survivors with disability told Commissioners that their family did not know about their experience of sexual abuse. In many cases, these survivors had experienced relationship breakdown with their family because the family had misunderstood or misinterpreted the survivor's behaviour following the abuse. Some said that they turned to drugs or alcohol, and others said they had been abusive or violent with their family or others. Some expressed similar sentiments to those articulated by 'Flynn', who told us that his family were not aware of his childhood experiences and 'don't realise all the crap I've gone through'.<sup>638</sup> 'Tyler' also told Commissioners his behaviour after the abuse led to him becoming isolated from his family.<sup>639</sup> He said he had trouble dealing with the abuse and started using drugs to help him forget. At the time of his private session, 'Tyler' was incarcerated for theft and driving offences. He had never told his family about the abuse, and said that it hurts that they think he's 'just a jailbird', without understanding what he has been through.<sup>640</sup>

## Intimate relationships

Survivors with disability like many other survivors commonly told Commissioners how the experience of child sexual abuse had affected their sexuality and intimate relationships. Some struggled with fears around intimacy and sex, avoiding these aspects of relationships altogether. 'Gerald' had learning difficulties and said he was sexually abused by a parish priest for three years, including during private tutoring sessions in the presbytery of the Catholic Church and on camps the priest organised.<sup>641</sup> He also said he was abused by an older student at a state school. He told the Commissioner:

I've never married – because I was frightened what would happen. I didn't know how to take chances. I've never had any long-term relationships. I can't. The abuse has affected all these abilities.<sup>642</sup>

Other survivors with disability told Commissioners about abusive intimate relationships in adulthood. This was more common among female survivors, who sometimes said that they experienced sexual assault or violence as a young adult and had to leave relationships to protect themselves and their children. 'Mia' was placed in a residential institution when she was a baby because of her disability.<sup>643</sup> She told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by 'host parents' who took her away for holidays. When she was 20, 'Mia' married and had children,

but she said that this relationship was abusive and she was raped by her husband. Many years later, 'Mia' is now in a healthy relationship with a partner who accepts that she does not want to have sex and probably never will again.<sup>644</sup>

Others said that they had managed to overcome some of these challenges later in life and had healthy and loving relationships. Survivors who had formed an intimate relationship told Commissioners that this person had helped them to manage the trauma associated with their experiences of child sexual abuse. 'Leeanda' told the Commissioner that following the abuse she left the Catholic school and moved to a school that offered more support.<sup>645</sup> She said she did not 'have boyfriends and go out to parties and do the normal teenage things', because of what had happened. 'Leeanda' said recently she had met and married a caring man. 'I had to find confidence in some person and that person had to be my husband.'<sup>646</sup>

## Professional support

Survivors with disability often said that talking about their experiences and being listened to was important for their wellbeing. For some people, this happened informally when they told someone close to them about the sexual abuse, while others were able to access professional support services. Many survivors told Commissioners that they valued the opportunity to tell their story during a private session and took comfort in knowing that people were finally listening and wanted to hear what they had to say.

Many survivors with disability, like all survivors, talked about the importance of being able to access counselling that was appropriate and affordable. Finding specialist counsellors who could work with survivors with disability was often difficult. Some said they had found counselling and other forms of professional support unhelpful. They told Commissioners that they needed support over extended periods of time, but often found this wasn't possible, making recovery more difficult. 'Flynn' explained that although he has access to regular counselling, it was not frequent enough: 'People just don't get deep enough into your issues to help you to get better'.<sup>647</sup> Other survivors, especially those who relied on a Disability Support Pension, said that the high cost of counselling made it difficult to commit to regular sessions.

## Education, employment and finances

Survivors with disability often described experiencing difficulties with education and employment at some point in their lives. Some believed they were denied the opportunity of getting a quality education because the school or residential institution they attended wasn't equipped to teach children with disability. 'Shawn' and 'Seth' were born in the 1960s and as children attended a residential facility run by the St John of God Brothers for boys with physical and intellectual disabilities.<sup>648</sup> In separate private sessions, both men described how boys were regularly physically and sexually abused by staff at the facility. They also told Commissioners

they received a poor education, and that this continued to impact their lives. ‘Seth’ said despite going to school to learn, he still cannot read or write.<sup>649</sup> He has intellectual disability, and as an adult was diagnosed with problems with his eyesight, which greatly impacted on his ability to read. He believed that these problems were never picked up by the school. It has been hard for ‘Seth’ to get a job because of his lack of education. He has done a lot of volunteer work and he feels he often gets ‘ripped off’. ‘Shawn’ told the Commissioner that his time at the institution had ruined his education: ‘When I left school it made it nearly impossible to get a job’.<sup>650</sup>

Other survivors with disability attributed poor performance and attendance at school to their experience of sexual abuse. ‘Toby’ went to a Catholic boarding school in the 1970s.<sup>651</sup> His asthma made him susceptible to illness and he spent a lot of time in the infirmary. ‘Toby’ told the Commissioner that on one occasion, when he was sick with a fever, ‘Brother Gibbs’ massaged his genitals under the pretext of treating him:

The whole thing sort of ended and I found the whole experience quite upsetting. From that point on I just didn’t go near the guy and so nothing else happened. In the scope of the evidence before you I’m acutely aware that mine is probably on the lower end, but it had a significant effect on me.<sup>652</sup>

‘Toby’ said that his schoolwork suffered and he graduated with poor marks. He attempted a university degree, but failed the first year and returned to the family farm ‘with my tail between my legs’. ‘Toby’ returned to university later in life and completed an undergraduate and a master’s degree.<sup>653</sup>

Some survivors’ parents and carers had moved them to a new school after learning that their child had been sexually abused. This was more common among survivors with disability who had been abused by a child with harmful sexual behaviours and when the abuse was relatively recent. Some families told Commissioners that it was difficult to find alternative education for their children who had needs that were not readily accommodated in mainstream schools. For others, moving schools had been a positive experience. ‘Chantelle’ said that her 10-year-old daughter ‘Daisy’ was sexually assaulted by an older boy at a school for children with disability a few years ago.<sup>654</sup> ‘Chantelle’ told the Commissioner that after the abuse, ‘Daisy’ went into ‘a very dark place’. However, since starting at her new school, ‘Chantelle’ said, ‘Daisy’ had ‘come back. She’s got her wings back now, she’s eager to go to school. She can’t wait to go’.<sup>655</sup>

Some survivors with disability struggled with discrimination and prejudice in the workplace. They felt that this had affected their opportunity to participate as fully in work as they would have liked. ‘Flynn’ told the Commissioner he had a traumatic, unstable childhood and was sexually abused by many adults and other children.<sup>656</sup> He has since been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and a cognitive impairment. ‘Flynn’ worked various jobs for almost 20 years, but is now on a disability pension. At work, he said people thought of him as ‘slow’, and he never progressed far.

## Seeking justice

For many survivors with disability, like many survivors, pursuing justice for what had happened to them was important. At times, this involved the criminal justice system or accessing compensation or counselling through redress schemes. However, some said that pursuing justice was difficult, and felt that it had made things worse. 'Rory' told the Commissioner that he was repeatedly raped by one of his teachers who was a Brother at the Catholic boarding school he attended in the late 1980s.<sup>657</sup> 'Rory' said that years later he disclosed the sexual abuse to his family and decided to make a statement to police about the perpetrator. What followed was distressing for him and his family. He said that the perpetrator was found guilty, but the conviction was overturned on appeal. When 'Rory' and his mother attended the private session, they said that a retrial was soon to take place. 'Rory' regretted having pursued legal action, and told us 'I feel I'm in a worse position now than what I was before I said anything. We have to go through the whole lot again ... This retrial stuff just absolutely gutted me'.<sup>658</sup>

### 7.6.2 Sources of strength and survival

Many survivors with disability told the Commissioners about relationships, work, education, counselling and other sources of strength in their lives. These survivors had found ways to support themselves and look out for others following their experiences of child sexual abuse.

## Family and friends

Some survivors with disability, said that they had worked throughout their lives to build healthy and loving relationships. Survivors who had formed an intimate relationship often told Commissioners that this person had helped them with the trauma associated with their experiences of child sexual abuse. 'Angus' said he was sexually abused in a facility for children with physical disability in the 1940s.<sup>659</sup> 'Angus' felt that he may have escaped some of the abuse because he could outrun the other children who were also being targeted by the perpetrators. As an adult, 'Angus' had started to write as a way of managing distressing thoughts associated with the abuse, and soon found himself popular as a speaker at functions. 'Angus' married and had four children, and described his wife as his 'backbone'. 'My wife, we have our blues like everyone, but I wouldn't swap her for gold. Wouldn't swap her for gold.'<sup>660</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners that earlier in life they had felt deep loneliness, but had found friendship as an older adult. They were grateful for these friendships, but in some cases regretted that their early years had been marked by a lack of close relationships with others. 'Kade' told the Commissioner he had no memory of the first few years of his life.<sup>661</sup> 'It's just a total blank, I don't know if I wiped it out or what. I don't remember. Even in my file, the years are blank. I don't know why.' 'Kade' has intellectual disability and lived in two residential institutions until he was 18. He said he was bullied and sexually abused by older boys in both places. 'Kade' told the Commissioner he moved into public housing in his sixties and explained how, for the first time, he felt like he was part of a community. One of his friends, 'Mary', accompanied 'Kade' to the Royal Commission and told the Commissioner how her family had 'taken him under our wing' and how much they loved him. 'Kade' told the Commissioner:

It's been important for me to tell you my story ... To show you how my experience in institutional care has affected me. It took me 43 years to finally get a decent place to live. I have friends in the block who look out for me and I have [my dog].<sup>662</sup>

## Counselling

Survivors with disability often told Commissioners about their experiences with people who provide professional advice and support services. Some survivors said counselling and therapy helped them to make sense of the sexual abuse and its impact on their lives, and to work through the trauma it had caused. Some survivors had received medical diagnoses of mental illness and were prescribed medication to manage their condition. 'Emory', who identifies as gender-neutral and prefers to be referred to as 'they', said in a private session they were diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and generalised anxiety disorder.<sup>663</sup> 'Emory' said they experienced regular night terrors as a result of the sexual abuse. 'Emory' self-harmed and has attempted suicide. 'Emory' told the Commissioner that ongoing therapy and medication has helped to alleviate their pain and suffering:

Being able to cry, scream and talk to therapists about my abuse has been like releasing poison from my mind. The hope of being able to live independently, build strength from my past and move on with my life, gives me a reason to get out of bed in the morning.<sup>664</sup>

## Education, careers and protecting other children

Some survivors with disability went on to gain an education and have rewarding careers and work. 'Lydia' told the Commissioner that in addition to being sexually and physically abused as a child, she was denied educational opportunities because of her disability.<sup>665</sup> After leaving the institution, 'Lydia' said she worked hard to earn a number of academic qualifications and raise two children on her own. She told the Commissioner: 'The more I was beaten, the stronger I became, and the more determined I was to overcome ... I went to the absolute extreme to prove them wrong'.<sup>666</sup>

Many survivors with disability said that they had a strong desire to protect other children from sexual abuse. Some channelled their energy into working with children, including those with disability. 'Anita' told the Commissioner that she did not want to pursue legal action because she never wants her family to know about the sexual abuse.<sup>667</sup> However, she now works in disability services and is passionate about protecting children with disability.

'Clarice' was born deaf and was sexually abused by a taxi driver hired to transport her between home and her school.<sup>668</sup> She is now pushing to have the case against him re-investigated. 'Clarice' told the Commissioner why she continues to fight for justice:

The reason that I wanted to go through the Royal Commission is to just stand up and say, 'Enough is enough'. Because I have a disability and there are future kids who will be born with disability ... They need to be protected. Our story needs to be heard. And because of the police and the way they handled it, their behaviour, it just shows the system is not enough. It's not good. Where's our safety? Where's our trust and our faith? I want to change that.<sup>669</sup>

## 8 Survivors in prison at the time of the private session

### 8.1 Overview

---

This chapter describes the common themes that emerged from our analysis of the experiences of child sexual abuse for survivors who were in adult prison at the time of their private session. These survivors were sexually abused as children in a range of institutional contexts, including out-of-home care and youth detention.

We conducted:

- qualitative analysis of a sample of 50 narratives written from the accounts given during private sessions by survivors who were in prison at the time of the private session
- quantitative analysis of the accounts given during private sessions of 713 survivors who were in prison at the time of the private session.

We also heard from survivors who had spent time in prison but were not incarcerated at the time of their private session, although their experiences were not part of this chapter. Information about the experiences of survivors who were sexually abused as a child while in youth detention is provided in Volume 15, *Contemporary detention environments*.

#### 8.1.1 Engagement strategy

The Royal Commission's prisoner engagement strategy is outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3. In brief, this engagement strategy involved Royal Commission officers visiting all correctional centres in Australia and working with staff and prisoner representatives within each state to:

- identify correctional centres where it would be appropriate to run private sessions
- provide information on the Royal Commission's work so that inmates were well informed about the scope of the inquiry and how they could tell us their stories
- ensure that all channels of communication relating to the Royal Commission's work, including phone calls and letters, were completely confidential
- undertake presentations for correctional centre staff on trauma-informed practice to enable them to respond appropriately to prisoners' experience of sexual abuse
- link survivors impacted by the trauma of child sexual abuse with appropriate counselling and support services within the prison and externally.

The implementation of this strategy enabled Commissioners to hold face-to-face private sessions in a total of 61 prisons across the states and territories. The private sessions were held in private areas within a prison, such as education areas and professional visiting rooms.



## 8.2 Profile of survivors in prison

---

Of the, 6,875 survivors and/or their family and friends who attended private sessions between May 2013 and May 2017 to share their experiences of child sexual abuse in Australian institutions, 713 (10.4 per cent) were in prison at the time of their private session.

Of the 713 survivors who were in prison when they participated in a private session:

- the majority (91.0 per cent) were male, consistent with the wider adult prison population in Australia<sup>670</sup>
- approximately one-fifth (20.6 per cent) were aged over 50 years, and 14.9 per cent were aged 18–29 years
- over half (53.3 per cent) said their experience of child sexual abuse occurred prior to 1990
- one-third (32.3 per cent) indicated they were an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivor
- 5.0 per cent told the Commissioner they were a person with disability at the time of the child sexual abuse.

On average, survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session were aged 41.6 years. Males were on average older than females (with an average age of 42.1 years compared with 36.8 years, respectively).

Further information about survivors who were in prison at the time they participated in private sessions is provided at Appendix S.

## 8.3 Experiences of abuse

---

During private sessions, survivors chose what they wanted to share with Commissioners. The majority of survivors did talk about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced as children. They told Commissioners what happened to them, the institutions where it happened and who sexually abused them.

This section reports quantitative information taking into account the varying numbers of survivors in prison at the time of their private session who provided information about the different types of child sexual abuse they experienced.<sup>671</sup>

### 8.3.1 Nature of the abuse

Almost three-quarters of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (72.1 per cent) provided information about their age at the time they were first sexually abused. Of those, more than half (58.6 per cent) indicated they were aged between 10 and 14 years when they first experienced sexual abuse in an institutional context. A further 23.5 per cent indicated they were aged between five and nine years, and 15.2 per cent said were aged between 15 and 17 years. A small proportion (2.7 per cent) said they were under five years old when they were first sexually abused in an institutional context. As discussed in Section 8.4.3, many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session said they were first abused – sexually and otherwise – outside of an institutional context, often at a young age.

Most survivors (93.0 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the frequency of the sexual abuse they experienced. Among these survivors, 86.7 per cent indicated they experienced multiple episodes of abuse. Among those who discussed the duration of the abuse (60.0 per cent), 71.5 per cent indicated that it continued for up to one year. Over one in four (28.0 per cent) said it occurred over a period of between two and five years, and a small proportion (7.5 per cent) said it lasted for more than five years.

The majority of survivors in prison at the time of their private session (86.0 per cent) talked to Commissioners about the types of sexual abuse they experienced. Among this group (noting that many experienced multiple episodes and types of sexual abuse):

- Almost two-thirds (65.4 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact abuse, such as sexual touching of a their body or being made to touch the perpetrator's body
- over half (59.2 per cent) described experiences of child sexual abuse involving penetration (for example, penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, another body part or an object)
- almost one in four (24.0 per cent) described experiences where their privacy was violated, such as being forced to undress in front of someone or being watched while showering
- almost one in five (19.7 per cent) described experiences consistent with being groomed for sexual contact (for example, behaviours that manipulate and control the child, their families and other support networks, or institutions with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence, and avoiding discovery of the sexual abuse)
- almost one in 10 (9.3 per cent) described experiences consistent with being exposed to sexual acts and material (for example, having sexual acts performed in front of them, having genitals exposed to them, or being shown pornographic material)

- 4.6 per cent described experiences consistent with child sexual exploitation (that is, being coerced or manipulated into participating in sexual activity in return for something such as food, accommodation, clothing, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money, or an incentive such as love, affection or safety).

Over half of survivors in prison (61.9 per cent) indicated experiencing other forms of abuse in the lead up to, during or after the child sexual abuse. Of these survivors, 72.3 per cent indicated they had experienced emotional abuse, such as use of fear, intimidation, bullying and humiliation. A similar proportion (72.1 per cent) described being physically abused, such as being hit, slapped, punched or kicked. Some also said they witnessed the abuse of others (10.0 per cent) and/or were neglected (9.3 per cent). A small proportion (2.5 per cent) said they were forced to engage in child labour.

## Grooming

One in five survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session and who spoke about the form of sexual abuse they experienced told Commissioners about being groomed by perpetrators before or after being sexually abused. Many said that the grooming occurred when they were in youth detention. Most survivors who said they were groomed in this context indicated that the perpetrator was a male officer or guard. 'Findlay' told the Commissioner he was in and out of 'juvies' because it felt safer than his home environment.<sup>672</sup> He said he got along reasonably well with prison staff, with one staff member being particularly friendly. 'Findlay' told the Commissioner how the officer's initial 'friendliness' turned into abuse:

I met this screw, this officer that worked there. His name was 'Simmo' ... He asked me if I wanted him to bring anything in. So I said, 'yeah, can you bring me some cigarettes?' And then he'd start bringing cigarettes in, lighters, bringing some pot. And then he started saying, 'Oh, you want some pornography?' So he's bringing all this pornography and he kept doing that and he was writing these letters and putting them under my door, like saying he loved me.<sup>673</sup>

'Findlay' said that 'Simmo's' interest in him escalated to the point that he would regularly visit 'Findlay' in his cell, lie next to him and fondle his genitals.<sup>674</sup>

Compared to survivors who were sexually abused in other institutions, a larger proportion of survivors sexually abused in youth detention said they were sexually abused by female adults, including being groomed. Many of these survivors said they were confused about the abuse and did not identify it as sexual abuse at the time. Some of these survivors told Commissioners that, at the time, they felt the sexual abuse was a positive thing as it reinforced their notions of adolescent masculinity. Others felt that as the abuse occurred on a regular basis, it must have been 'normal'.

'Rusty' told the Commissioner that he entered a youth detention facility at the age of 14.<sup>675</sup> One of the custodial officers, 'Kathy', would often come and visit him when she was on night shift. 'To begin with she'd come in ... and she'd sit on the bed and talking and that. And she'd lie down next time.' 'Rusty' said that 'Kathy' began sexually abusing him not long after he arrived at the centre, using small treats to entice sexual favours. He said she continued to sexually abuse him until he turned 18 and was released from the centre:

She'd bring you things down at night time when she was on the night shift. She'd bring you Milo and biscuits and things like that. At the time I guess I was just confused. I didn't really understand whether it was wrong or right. And then over the time that I was there and it kept happening then I just thought it was normal. Then thinking about it now but, it was shit to be honest.<sup>676</sup>

## Substance use

Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session also commonly talked about the role drugs and alcohol played in the lead up to and at the time of the child sexual abuse. Many of these survivors described how substance use made them more vulnerable to being sexually abused, whether they or the adult perpetrator were using substances. Some survivors were deliberately given substances by adult perpetrators, with or without their consent, in order to make them more compliant and less resistant to sexual abuse. 'Caspar' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by family members as a young boy and started using heroin and other drugs at a young age.<sup>677</sup> 'Caspar' said that when he was 12, he was placed in a Catholic boys' home. He said the manager of the home gave him drugs in return for sexual favours and another man, who did not work at the home, would visit and take him on 'excursions'. On these excursions, 'Caspar' said the man forced him to take drugs such as heroin, aerosols and cannabis and then sexually abused him while he was incapacitated. 'Caspar' told the Commissioner, 'He'd take me out and ... [I'd] come back very, very stoned and drugged'.<sup>678</sup>

Female survivors shared similar stories. 'Peta' told the Commissioner that her boyfriend's father, the local police officer, used to supply her and her friends with drugs and paint to sniff.<sup>679</sup> 'Peta' described how the police officer and two other men raped her after supplying her with drugs:

He was just like looking at me, watching me sleep, and I think I was high, hallucinating. Then they grabbed me and they held me two days in a shed ... They done stuff with me. They had me tied up, but I got away.<sup>680</sup>

### 8.3.2 The institutions

One in three survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (34.9 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused in multiple institutions. Half of the survivors said they were abused in out-of-home care (50.5 per cent), which included 15.3 per cent who said they were abused in contemporary out-of-home care, such as foster care, kinship or relative care or residential care. One-third of survivors in prison at the time of their private session (32.7 per cent) said they were abused in a youth detention facility. Smaller proportions of these survivors said they were sexually abused in a school (16.0 per cent) or when they were involved in religious activities (5.9 per cent).

The majority of survivors (62.0 per cent) said they were abused in a government-managed institution and close to one-third (31.0 per cent) indicated they were sexually abused in an institution managed by a religious organisation.

Of the survivors who said they were sexually abused in religious-managed institutions, the majority (66.5 per cent) said they were abused in Catholic institutions. More than one in ten (14.5 per cent) said they were sexually abused in an institution affiliated with the Anglican Church, and 7.2 per cent said they were abused in an institution managed by The Salvation Army.

### 8.3.3 Adult perpetrators and children with harmful sexual behaviours

The large majority of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (92.6 per cent) said they were sexually abused as a child by one or more males. Just over one in 10 (10.8 per cent) said they were sexually abused by one or more females. Almost half (44.5 per cent) told Commissioners they were sexually abused by multiple people.

Most survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (79.5 per cent) indicated the approximate age of the person or persons who sexually abused them. Among these survivors, 86.2 per cent said they were sexually abused by adults and 26.3 per cent said they were sexually abused by another child or children.

Most adult perpetrators we heard about from these survivors held some form of authority over the child within the institution where the sexual abuse occurred. Some adult perpetrators held multiple roles within an institution (for example, teacher and priest). In general, the Royal Commission recorded only the 'primary' role (for example, teacher rather than priest if the victim was abused in a school).

The large majority of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (92.3 per cent) described the role the perpetrator held within the institution. Among this group (noting that many were sexually abused by more than one person):

- over one in four (28.3 per cent) said they were abused by custodial staff
- one in five (19.3 per cent) said they were abused by a person in religious ministry (such as a minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, The Salvation Army officer, church elder, religious brother or sister and any other person recognised as a spiritual leader in a religious institution)
- 14.7 per cent said they were abused by a residential care worker, cottage parent and/or house parent
- 14.6 per cent said they were abused by a foster carer or other adult member of a foster care household
- just under one in 10 (9.0 per cent) indicated they were abused by a teacher.

## How children tried to avoid sexual abuse and protect each other

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session spoke to Commissioners about the ways that they and other children had attempted to protect themselves and each other from child sexual abuse in institutions.

Many survivors who were in out-of-home care as children said they ran away from the institution after being sexually abused as a child. This was especially common among survivors who were sexually abused over an extended period of time. 'Sabrina May' said she was placed in foster care after her father died and her mother struggled with the grief of losing 'the only person who knew how to fix her and pick her up'.<sup>681</sup> 'Sabrina May' said she and her sister were Aboriginal, but they were sent to a non-Aboriginal family who physically, emotionally and sexually abused both of them. 'Sabrina May' told the Commissioner, 'They constantly laughed at us ... They constantly told us, "You're not our family. Don't think you're our family. We're here to show you sort of people how family is orientated"'.<sup>682</sup>

After four or five months, 'Sabrina May' said she and her sister ran away and a woman in the street caught them. Because the girls were so distraught, the woman took them in overnight. 'Sabrina May' and her sister were reunited with their mother after this, but for a while 'Sabrina May' said she 'just went down the wrong path'.<sup>683</sup>

Others said they used violence to resist the child sexual abuse. Violence as a means of resisting abuse was more commonly described by survivors who had experienced sexual abuse over an extended period of time and saw no other way out of their situation. Often these survivors had a history of using violence to settle disputes. 'Alan Sam' told the Commissioner that his relationship with his big brother had been violent, which was the catalyst for him running away

from home in his early teens.<sup>684</sup> 'Alan Sam' said he spent time on the streets, 'drunk every night, drunk till I blanked out'. He said he moved in and out of several youth detention centres where he said he was routinely physically abused. In one centre, he said, he was sexually abused by an officer: 'It was always the same officer. We'd get plucked, one of us'd get plucked and taken up to the gym ... and just a similar thing. Just fondling, make us fondle him back'.<sup>685</sup>

'Alan Sam' said he eventually fought back: 'I attacked staff ... It wasn't going to happen again, you know?' 'Alan Sam' did not say whether fighting back succeeded in preventing further sexual abuse.<sup>686</sup>

## 8.4 Circumstances at the time of abuse

---

### 8.4.1 Social and cultural context

The majority of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners about patterns of entrenched disadvantage that they experienced as children, which eventually led them into the prison system. From a young age they were often subjected to sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect. They also described inadequate protection by welfare services, youth detention services and police from such abuse and neglect, indicating that these institutions failed to adequately respond and keep them safe. Many survivors saw links between these failings, their home environments and their vulnerability to child sexual abuse in institutions.

Many of these survivors told Commissioners of their involvement with authorities, including police, at an early age. These survivors often said that as they grew older, they chose to spend less time at home in an effort to avoid sexual and/or physical abuse, family conflict and dysfunction. They said they had to look after themselves, but often did not know how to do this in safe ways. Some said their family circumstances made them more vulnerable to being homeless, avoiding school or spending time unsupervised in public areas. These activities, as well as their involvement in petty crime or substance abuse, often brought them to the attention of police. 'Shaun Michael' grew up in Brisbane in the 1980s.<sup>687</sup> He told the Commissioner that his father was a 'cruel' and 'violent' man although he 'tried his best ... to be a father'. His mother was a member of the Stolen Generations. 'She was a good lady, my mum, she tried her best.' 'Shaun Michael' wasn't interested in attending school and hung around with his cousins, wagging school and smoking marijuana. One night, when he was 11 or 12 years old, he said he was picked up by police:

They arrested me ... they knew who I was. They knew my last name. They knew my parents ... they didn't give a fuck. They just went, 'Send him to [youth detention]'. I wasn't charged with anything and I found myself in a youth detention centre ... I spent most of my time trying to learn how to make a bed ... [and] taking my clothes off, bending over and showing my arse to the motherfuckers.<sup>688</sup>

When 'Shaun Michael' was released, he went back to living with his parents and 'running the streets'. He said he was often chased by police because he was on the streets, not because he was committing crimes. 'They'd always harass us kids.'<sup>689</sup>

Many survivors said that as they grew older, they became increasingly disengaged from their schooling. They told Commissioners that as children they did not understand the value of getting a good education. Some said that they received little encouragement from their families to attend school. Others said that attending school was difficult, because of the transient nature of their lives. Some had families who would move between different communities at least once or twice a year. Some survivors felt like they did not stay in the one place long enough to make friends at school and become part of the community. Male survivors in particular told us they left secondary school early with poor reading and writing skills and found it difficult to find and hold onto good jobs.

Other survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners they were discriminated against because of their disadvantaged background and difficult family circumstances. They believed they were regarded as of little value to the community, and that people treated them accordingly. Some older Aboriginal prisoners told Commissioners how, as children, they were forcibly removed from their parents and placed on missions, while others spoke of how they were made a ward of the state after being assessed as 'uncontrollable' by government authorities.

'Caspar' told the Commissioner he was abandoned by his mother when he was very young and spent most of his childhood being passed between different family members.<sup>690</sup> He said he was subjected to significant sexual abuse by these family members and by the age of 10 he had spent time living rough on the streets. At 11, he was made a ward of the state. As a child, 'Caspar' said he was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and labelled 'uncontrollable'. After getting into trouble for being unsupervised in public places, he saw a court-appointed psychologist. 'Caspar' said he told the psychologist about the sexual abuse, but 'they just sort of dismissed it'. After that, 'Caspar' said he started using heroin, became involved in crime to support his addiction and spent time in children's homes, where he was sexually abused by the manager of the home and a man who took him out for 'excursions'. 'Caspar' told the Commissioner that having access to counselling and other support when he was being sexually abused as a child would have made a difference to his life, 'instead of just being left to use drugs and get abused'.<sup>691</sup>



## 8.4.2 Institutional context

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners they were sexually abused in a residential institution, such as a youth detention facility or historical residential institution. About one-third of survivors (34.9 per cent) said they were sexually abused in multiple institutions, and the majority (62.0 per cent) said they were sexually abused in an institution managed by the government.

### Historical residential institutions and out-of-home care

The majority of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners that they had spent some time as a child in foster care, kinship/relative care or residential group homes. Some survivors said they had spent time in all three. Many survivors told Commissioners they had been sexually abused by their foster parents, foster siblings, or the extended family or acquaintances of the foster family. Some said they had been sexually abused by staff in residential group homes. A small proportion of survivors said they were sexually abused while they were in the care of the state, but were homeless or living in otherwise transient circumstances. Many survivors told Commissioners that they believed all of these settings lacked adequate supervision of vulnerable children and that adults in positions of power were not effectively monitored.

### Foster care

Some survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners that their placements with some foster families was not appropriate. These survivors said that placements appeared to be made based on the availability of foster families rather than the suitability of the family and its capacity to meet the child's needs. Some survivors told Commissioners that they were sexually abused in foster families that did not appear to have undergone any formal assessment by the appropriate government authorities. Others said their foster families did not have the resources to adequately care for children. As noted earlier, 'Sabrina May' and her sister were removed from their mother's care after their father died and their mother struggled to give them adequate care.<sup>692</sup> 'Sabrina May' said that although she and her sister were Aboriginal, they were placed with a non-Aboriginal foster family where they were given a little room just off the lounge room that had 'one single mattress on the floor and that was it'. 'Sabrina May' said she and her sister had to sit at a separate table when they ate, and were not allowed to play with the foster family's children, or touch their toys or belongings. 'Sabrina May' said that she and her sister were made to bathe after the foster family's children, who would laugh at them and say, 'Look how dirty you are. Look at the water'. She told the Commissioner that the foster father sexually abused both her and her sister, telling her, 'No one will ever, ever believe you. We're a well-fitted family. No one will ever believe what I have done to you kids'.<sup>693</sup>

Some survivors described moving between multiple placements because they were maltreated in certain placements, or because they did not get on with the foster family. Some survivors described being sexually abused in several placements. Some felt that they were especially vulnerable to abuse because the foster family knew they had been in multiple placements, and took this as a sign that they probably had no supportive parents or friends. Some survivors said they were unable to stop abuse occurring because they did not have the skills and knowledge to do so, and that violence and abuse had become a normal part of their young lives. 'Ruth May' told the Commissioner that during one 12-month period, she was placed in dozens of foster homes.<sup>694</sup> The following year, just after her 13th birthday, she said she was raped by a cousin's boyfriend while in the care of the state. After that, 'Ruth May' said, in 'about 90 per cent of the places that I was in, there was some sort of sexual activity, which I've never really thought about ... till now. That's really bad'.<sup>695</sup>

### **Residential institutions**

Some survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners about being sexually abused while in residential institutions, including in facilities managed by government and facilities managed by or affiliated with religious institutions. These survivors said that in these residential facilities, staff designed and managed children's activities and routines, and that some staff manipulated the activities in order to be able to sexually abuse children in areas away from the supervision of others. Some survivors told Commissioners about adult perpetrators who had used recreational activities as the pretext for isolating and abusing them. 'Mason James' described how, as a four-year-old, his uncle had forced him to do 'sickening things' with his female cousin.<sup>696</sup> 'Mason James' said he was diagnosed with ADHD when he was nine, and as an 11-year-old, was placed in a Catholic boys' home after he 'chucked a knife at my father over a cigarette'. 'Mason James' said he enjoyed painting, so when he heard an announcement over the loudspeaker that a watercolour class was about to start, he decided to join. He said he was the only student in the room, and the elderly Christian Brother teaching the class took the opportunity of being alone with 'Mason James' to sexually abuse him. 'Mason James' said that while he was painting, the Brother would stand behind him and 'he'd put his hands down my pants'.<sup>697</sup>

Other survivors said they were sexually abused in institutions under the guise of medical or disciplinary routines. Many said it was easy for perpetrators to manipulate these routines because they were accepted as part of everyday activity in the institution, and were difficult to avoid because these survivors depended on the institution for their ongoing care. Many of these survivors also said that the medical and disciplinary routines they experienced involved close physical proximity between adults and children, making it easier for perpetrators to sexually abuse them in the process. 'Kayla' told the Commissioner she was placed in an Anglican residential group home at the age of 12 in the early 1990s. 'Kayla' said the priests at the home sexually abused her and the other girls under the guise of 'reflex tests'.<sup>698</sup> When she misbehaved, 'Kayla' said she was physically and sexually abused. She told the Commissioner:

I think it was allowed back then. They were allowed to hit us and they were allowed to do other things. And they were allowed to restrain us and lay on us ... I wasn't really a bad kid, I really wasn't. And then I'd tell him, 'Get off me' and he wouldn't get off ... It happened quite a lot ... When I finally got out of there I was already wrecked.<sup>699</sup>

### Homelessness and temporary accommodation

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners that they felt like they 'fell through the cracks' of the child welfare system after running away from abusive or otherwise unsuitable placements.<sup>700</sup> Some said they lived a transient existence moving from shelter to shelter, infrequently – if ever – coming into contact with social workers. It was in these conditions that some survivors said they were sexually abused. 'Dani' told the Commissioner she moved to a youth shelter in regional Queensland to escape an alcoholic mother and violent stepfather when she was 16.<sup>701</sup> 'Dani' said she did not know anybody in the town. She explained that the shelter was only funded to provide staff in the evenings and overnight, so everyone had to leave at seven o'clock each morning. 'Dani' said they were not allowed back until seven at night:

They'd tell you to go and try and find a job or something but they'd just sort of put you out the door and I didn't know anyone so the only people I had to talk to was all the kids they'd kicked out previously that would hang around the front.<sup>702</sup>

'Dani' said she did not really want to spend all her time with the group, but there was nothing else to do. 'Dani' told the Commissioner about what happened when she was pressured to drink homemade spirits:

I don't know what was in it but I had a couple of drinks with them and then I couldn't move. And then I woke up and one of the older boys that was there, I got raped by one of the older boys, and then I tried to fight him off but he ended up assaulting me and then they called the police and the police took me to the hospital but I freaked out at the hospital so I just walked home.<sup>703</sup>

### Youth detention

Almost one third of survivors in prison at the time of their private session (32.7 per cent) told Commissioners they had been sexually abused as a child in a youth detention setting. The majority of these survivors were male. Survivors described how the activities and behaviour of children and young people within the centres were restricted, as were interactions with people outside the facility. Many said they felt physically and socially isolated. Survivors said the emphasis on security at these centres meant that they sometimes experienced coercive behaviour from staff, often involving close physical proximity between adults and children.

Many survivors described youth detention centres as violent places where physical abuse of children by staff was tolerated as a means of enforcing rules. Many survivors said this physical abuse occurred alongside sexual abuse by staff. 'Wesley James' told the Commissioner he was first sent to youth detention in his early teens, where he was subjected to the first of many degrading strip searches.<sup>704</sup> He told the Commissioner:

Sometimes you'd feel uncomfortable with whoever was doing it because of the way they look at you you'd refuse to take your clothes off. So they'd lock you down in isolation which was – they used to tell us boys downstairs in isolation was a morgue where they used to keep the dead bodies – and they'd lock us down there for days and weeks on end.<sup>705</sup>

'Wesley James' said that violence was common at the centre: 'being assaulted by the screws [guards], being choked by the screws, being thrown around, being punched, being called all sorts of names'. He said that some of the officers would give the boys sexually explicit magazines at night, then come back later to try and catch them touching themselves. When he was 13, he was moved to another youth detention centre where he said the level of violence was just as bad, and there was also a lot of sexual abuse between the children in detention, mostly from older boys targeting younger boys:

I can remember one time we was down in the remand yard in the swimming pool and another boy he actually got penetrated by another boy. I wasn't going to say nothing because maybe they'd do that to me. So nothing was said of it.<sup>706</sup>

Survivors who had spent time in youth detention often described feeling as though they were constantly being watched or supervised, but that this did not protect them from being sexually abused. Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session often told Commissioners that when staff witnessed children in detention abusing their peers, they did not intervene to stop the abuse. 'Dermott' told the Commissioner he was sent to a violent youth detention centre when he was 14 years old, where 'some of the officers used to bash us boys and stuff, you know, rough handling us. We couldn't really stick up for ourselves'.<sup>707</sup> He said that older boys would often sexually abuse the younger boys in the showers. 'It happened to me ... heaps.' He said the guards knew, but they 'didn't really care, you know'.<sup>708</sup>

### 8.4.3 Family context

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session described childhoods characterised by high levels of disadvantage, maltreatment and trauma. These survivors often described how a combination of family-related factors brought them to the attention of child welfare authorities and police, or led to them running away, all of which resulted in their leaving the family home to live elsewhere early in their lives. Many said that before being institutionalised, they had been sexually, physically or emotionally abused and neglected,

or had experienced high levels of parental conflict or instability. Many were affected by poverty and intergenerational trauma. These experiences and circumstances often led to them being removed from their families and placed in institutions where they were sexually abused.

## Child abuse and neglect

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners that as children they were maltreated by family members, which was often the catalyst for them entering institutional care. They described being sexually, physically or emotionally abused and neglected. Many said they experienced multiple forms of abuse and neglect in the family home. Often, they said violence was perpetrated by parents, stepfathers, male relatives, family acquaintances, other children and strangers who came into the home. Physical abuse was especially common.

‘Kent’ told the Commissioner he grew up in a ‘very dysfunctional household’.<sup>709</sup> He said his stepfather was a cruel man, who would punish ‘Kent’ and his brother harshly. If ‘Kent’ wet the bed, he said he was sent to sleep in the garage with the dogs. He said his mother ‘tried the best she could ... but she really loved this man’. ‘Kent’ said he and his brother were sexually abused by a neighbour when ‘Kent’ was nine years old, and that the abuse continued for a period of two years. ‘Kent’ started avoiding school, ‘becoming uncontrollable’ and getting in with ‘the wrong crowd’. His parents divorced and his mother found work, ‘and things were going well for once in our lives. But I was already tormented’. When he was about 14, Kent spent eight months in a youth detention centre. He said he found the centre ‘confronting’ and was picked on – and sexually abused – by other children in detention.<sup>710</sup>

Other survivors described childhood experiences consistent with being neglected, though few actually used this term. Instead, they said that as children they did not have enough food to eat, they were left unsupervised, or that their parents were unconcerned about whether or not they attended school. Some survivors said that such neglect indirectly led to the involvement of police, because they were observed avoiding school, misbehaving or committing crimes. ‘Arlen’ grew up in Western Australia in the 1980s and told the Commissioner:

I had a pretty rough upbringing. A bad life ... I think because we were poor ... I was sort of brought up in a way, if a need ... being a need to eat, you know, then if it comes to it, if you have to steal, well ... you steal like, the food to eat, not items to sell, you know.<sup>711</sup>

‘Arlen’ said he began committing petty crimes in early adolescence. At the age of 14, he was placed in a youth detention centre, which he described as:

a violent place on both sides, from us as kids, and from the people who used to ... the way they used to treat us when they’d try and stop an altercation ... of course, they didn’t have to go to some of the extents of what they went to.<sup>712</sup>

## Exposure to drugs and alcohol

Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session also told Commissioners about the role that drugs and alcohol had played in their exposure to abuse and neglect. Some said that family members who abused substances were often violent or neglectful, leading to the survivors being removed and placed in out-of-home care, where they were sexually abused. 'Ross Andrew' told the Commissioner that his dad was absent and he lived in a caravan park with his mother and siblings.<sup>713</sup> He said his mother was an alcoholic, and he 'was pretty much brought home and put in a shoebox'. 'Ross Andrew' said his mother died when he was 12 and he was placed into care, but that his living situation was unstable and he spent a lot of time on the streets. He said he came to the attention of police and was admitted to a youth detention centre where he was sexually abused by one of the guards.<sup>714</sup>

Other survivors described drugs as a way of life in their household and told Commissioners that they had been introduced to illegal substances by their parents. 'Findlay' told the Commissioner his mother was often in violent relationships, and most of her partners perpetrated sexual or physical abuse against him.<sup>715</sup> 'Findlay' saw youth detention as a means of escaping his home life. He told the Commissioner:

My mum and my stepdad, first of all they'd give me drugs when I was nine or something, so I started with amphetamines at a young age. I used to get abused and that at my home, all sorts of abuse. So I started doing crime and that so I could actually get away. And then I ended up going to [youth detention] and then I thought, 'Oh yeah this is better because I'm not getting abused and that'. So I started going back to 'juvies' in and out.<sup>716</sup>

When he was 13, 'Findlay' was moved to a different youth detention centre where he said he was groomed and sexually abused by an officer.

Some survivors said their family members had been involved in the manufacturing or distribution of drugs, and that as children they had also become involved with this. Most said that these activities led to engagement with police, youth detention and eventually prison. 'Rusty' told the Commissioner that his father came back into his life when he was 13:

He was cooking meth and I pretty much learned from him to cook meth before I was even 15. And that's part of the reason I think I was in and out of youth detention, stealing for money for precursors and things like that. And then once I was in the system I pretty much couldn't get out. It was a revolving door, around and around.<sup>717</sup>

Many survivors said they had used drugs and alcohol in an effort to manage the trauma of their life experiences. Some said they started using illegal substances as children, which often led to dependence lasting into adulthood and interactions with the criminal justice system. 'Ruth May' told the Commissioner she was raped on her 13th birthday by a cousin's boyfriend while she was in foster care.<sup>718</sup> 'Ruth May' said she reported the abuse to police, and 'was in that police station forever ... felt like forever anyway ... I just remember thinking how horrible it was ...

I was a virgin till that event'. 'Ruth May' said that after being raped, 'I started meth. I was only 13 when I started meth. I didn't even know what drugs were ... I hadn't even done sex education and I was already on drugs'. As an adult, 'Ruth May' said she struggled with drug use and mental health issues, and has been blacklisted from the assisted housing list because of her current conviction for manufacturing methamphetamine in the government house in which she was living.<sup>719</sup>

## Witnessing abuse, housing instability and isolation

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners that as children they witnessed the abuse of others – often their mothers at the hands of fathers, stepfathers or their mother's boyfriends. Very few of these survivors described supportive relationships with their fathers in childhood. They described abuse ranging from arguments to physical violence and attempted murder. Survivors often said that living in situations with high levels of conflict had increased their fear and anxiety as children, and made them less trusting of adults generally. 'Rusty' told the Commissioner he was five years old when his parents separated in the early 1990s.<sup>720</sup> He said he often saw his father being violent towards his mother and that one time he had seen his father try to run her over with a car. He said he believed this exposure influenced his antisocial tendencies later in life.

Other survivors said that their mothers had tried to protect them and their siblings from family violence, but that this had ended in more violence and abuse being directed at the mother. In these circumstances, survivors often said that they stopped expecting someone would protect them, and realised that they should learn to make their own way in the world. 'Kent' told the Commissioner what happened when his mother found out about 'Kent's' stepfather's abuse of him and his brother.<sup>721</sup> His mother 'objected and tried to intervene, but he bashed her. Broke her leg, broke her jaw'. 'Kent' said he learned from this that only bad things could come from getting his mother's help. 'Kent' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by a neighbour for a period of two years from the age of nine, but that he was too scared to tell anyone about it, in case it made his stepfather do more bad things to the family. 'I didn't know what to do, so I just held it in.'<sup>722</sup>

Some survivors described living in transient circumstances as one or both of their parents moved around to seek employment, begin new relationships or end old ones. These survivors often said that this constant movement made it difficult to form long-lasting or meaningful bonds with other children, institutions or their local community. Some felt that the frequent relocations may have contributed to them being placed in institutions. 'Pierce' told the Commissioner he 'didn't have the best of upbringings'.<sup>723</sup> He moved frequently between states and schools with his mother, brother and father, who was a heavy drinker and often violent. 'Pierce' said that when he was 13, his father died and his mother had difficulty coping. 'As soon as me dad killed himself, she give me away. I went to foster care, through secure welfare, all the boys' homes systems.'<sup>724</sup>

Other survivors told Commissioners how their parents' behaviour contributed to them becoming socially isolated from peers. Some said that they came to associate with the 'wrong crowd' because they felt that they did not have to explain their family situation in such social groups in the way they did to children who were unfamiliar with family violence and substance abuse.<sup>725</sup> 'Lenny James' grew up in rural Victoria and his parents separated when he was about 10.<sup>726</sup> He stayed with his father, who had various mental health issues, even though he really wanted to live with his mum. One day, when 13-year-old 'Lenny James' was at home with two mates, his father attempted suicide. His friends' parents banned their kids from visiting 'Lenny James' from then on.<sup>727</sup>

## Other families

A small number of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session described childhoods without high levels of disadvantage and trauma. The experiences of these survivors reflected those of the wider group of survivors who were not in prison at the time of their private session. This group of survivors often told Commissioners they lived with their parents at the time of the sexual abuse, and if they did not, had a close and supportive relationship with them. Most described being sexually abused in educational settings or non-residential settings, and many believed that the perpetrator had manipulated their parents' trust in the institution. Like other survivors, many survivors who lived with their family as children and who were in prison at the time of their private session said they received negative responses from family members when they disclosed.

'Carrie' grew up in a small town in the 1980s and was a member of a local girls' activities group.<sup>728</sup> She told the Commissioner that the group would sometimes go out and do chores for people in the community. 'Carrie' said that she was sent unaccompanied and unsupervised to a man's home over a three-year period, and that the man would force her to 'do all sorts of stuff'. She said the man's son 'was in on it as well ... He was really nasty'. 'Carrie' said that her attendance at the man's house was never monitored or supervised by the group. 'Carrie' said that after a few years, her friend's mother started noticing changes in her behaviour and 'Carrie' told her about the abuse. The friend's mother told 'Carrie's' mother, who did not believe 'Carrie' – 'I got flogged badly over it'.<sup>729</sup>



## 8.5 Experiences of disclosure

---

Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told similar stories of disclosure to other survivors. Many did not disclose the sexual abuse at the time it occurred, though some had tried. Survivors commonly said that as children they had few people in their lives they could trust. Some said they tried to tell people in authority at the time, but had their experiences dismissed or minimised, and so they learned to protect themselves by keeping silent and distrusting authority. Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told us that as children they had seldom disclosed any form of maltreatment, and this silence about their lives included not telling about child sexual abuse.

### 8.5.1 Circumstances of disclosure

Most survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session spoke to Commissioners about when they disclosed (82.9 per cent). Among these survivors, 57.0 per cent disclosed their experience of child sexual abuse for the first time as adults. Like survivors in private sessions more generally, they described barriers to disclosing at the time of the abuse and later as adults.

Many survivors who were in prison were protective of their privacy and, outside of their private session, did not disclose the abuse. They said that prisons often provided only limited access to counselling and other support services to address the trauma of child sexual abuse, which meant that they did not have anyone to tell about the abuse. Others said that there were avenues to disclose, but that there was a risk with these services that other prisoners would find out about them being victims, and that this was a risk they were not prepared to take. ‘Dan Peter’ had spent many years in jail by the time he attended a private session.<sup>730</sup> He told the Commissioner he was not interested in disclosing the details of the abuse, despite the impact this had on his prospects of parole:

And it’s just so hard for me and there’s issues that I may not even get out of here on parole because they want me to do a violence prevention course, and I’ve been told that’s very intense and they want your whole background. I can’t do that so you know, it’s going to screw my head up more and it’s going to screw my family up because I won’t be able to get parole over it either.<sup>731</sup>

Many male survivors described prisons and youth detention centres as having a strong ‘macho’ culture that was far from conducive to disclosing child sexual abuse. Prison life, bound by various rules and codes – such as not ‘dobbing’ (telling others) – also reinforced a general mistrust in authority. Female survivors in prison at the time of their private session commonly said they had no one to tell and even if they did, that no one really cared about what happened to them as a child anyway.

Many survivors talked about the experience of disclosing child sexual abuse for the first time to the Royal Commission. For some survivors, the timing of the Royal Commission helped them decide to disclose. Many expressed a sense of relief for having the opportunity to tell their story. Others told Commissioners how hard it had been to disclose child sexual abuse and described the emotional experience of reliving the trauma.

## Speaking to the Royal Commission

More than two-thirds of survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners details of the people they disclosed to (68.3 per cent). Of those, one in three (31.4 per cent) told their story for the first time to the Royal Commission. Many said that the existence and profile of the Royal Commission had encouraged them to come forward. These survivors often said they felt the timing was right to tell their story and that they had confidence they would be taken seriously. Like other survivors, prisoners often came forward hoping that their story might change the lives of children now. 'Dawson' was in his forties when he spoke to the Commissioner and said he had been in jail for most of his adult life.<sup>732</sup> As a teenager, 'Dawson' recalled being physically abused by staff at a children's shelter and, not long after, being sexually abused by a guard in a boys' home. 'Dawson' said he tried to put a stop to the sexual abuse, but 'that's when I got in more trouble. I got bashed, completely badly, by blokes in the next unit because [the perpetrator] told them I was a poof'. 'Dawson' said he had never disclosed his experience of sexual abuse until speaking with the Commissioner. 'Dawson' said he now felt ready to talk about it:

The time that I spent in boys' homes was pretty horrific. I'd sort of blanked it all out and not thought about it till the Royal Commission brought it up ... I thought maybe it's time something was said.<sup>733</sup>

Many survivors said they had kept silent or blocked out memories or thoughts of the sexual abuse for a long time. These survivors often said that the Royal Commission had prompted them to think about the effect the abuse had had on their lives. 'Alexei' told the Commissioner he had endured a 'never-ending cycle' of abuse in boys' homes and youth detention facilities, and that after this, he became addicted to heroin and began committing crimes to support his habit.<sup>734</sup> 'Alexei' said he had never told anyone about the abuse. 'I never reported it. I just always gritted the teeth and got on with it.' He said he had hinted to his legal representation that 'something' had happened while he was in care, but had never gone into the specific details. 'Alexei' said he was prompted to share his story after seeing one of the perpetrators who sexually abused him on television. 'It just brought back everything. Just the same person ... the hair's grey, and the beard was grey, but otherwise it was him.' 'Alexei' said he was starting to recognise the links between his drug taking and the sexual abuse in his childhood. 'All these years, I never even understood why I used heroin.' He told the Commissioner he might report the abuse to police.<sup>735</sup>

Some survivors said they had disclosed soon after the first time they were sexually abused – often by a family member – but that nothing was done. This gave them little faith that disclosing subsequent abuse would have any effect. Some survivors described the sense of relief they felt after disclosing the full details of the abuse to the Royal Commission. ‘Simeon’ told the Commissioner that he entered foster care as a young infant because his mother had been too unwell to look after him.<sup>736</sup> He described his foster parents as very loving and supportive and he stayed with them throughout his childhood. ‘Simeon’ said that he had a learning difficulty, and after not coping and ‘misbehaving’ at primary school, he was sent to a specialised disability school. He said the school arranged for him to get picked up and dropped off by a taxi driver every day. ‘Simeon’ told the Commissioner that the taxi driver sexually abused him on a number of occasions. He recalls telling his foster mother who reported the abuse to authorities, but ‘Simeon’ said that nothing changed, and the same taxi driver continued to drive him to school. He said this lack of action discouraged him from disclosing after he was sexually abused by his foster brother. Instead, he carried the burden of this secret. Telling the Royal Commission was the first time he had told the full story. ‘Simeon’ said it was a relief. ‘I feel like I’ve let a lot come off. I feel like I’ve lost a lot of weight from saying it.’<sup>737</sup>

### 8.5.2 Barriers and facilitators to disclosure

Most survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (75.2 per cent) described the barriers they experienced to disclosing the details of the sexual abuse. Many said they experienced shame or embarrassment (43.5 per cent), and almost one in four (23.1 per cent) said they had no one to disclose to. Over one in five (21.8 per cent) said they feared retribution. A substantial minority said they feared not being believed (15.3 per cent) or wanted to forget (15.1 per cent).

#### Independence: Self-reliance and non-disclosure

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session had lived in out-of-home care followed by periods of time in youth detention. Many said that they had looked after themselves because their early life experiences had taught them not to rely on adults or others for protection. For many of these survivors, child sexual abuse in an institution was only a part of a wider erosion of their rights as children, existing alongside sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect at home and various types of abuse from strangers. Some survivors felt that the sexual abuse had undermined their self-worth and that they were undeserving of care or support.

## Culture of silence and 'nothing we could do'

Most male prisoners who attended private sessions said they had a history of not talking about their experience of child sexual abuse. Many said that disclosing child sexual abuse was not something they would do. 'Donnie' told the Commissioner he had not disclosed the abuse to anyone until very recently and that his girlfriend did not know.<sup>738</sup> He said this was partly to do with his upbringing. He described his father as 'old school', and told the Commissioner that his father used to say 'you don't talk about your problems to anyone. Everyone's got enough problems of their own'. 'Donnie' said he had never disclosed to his father, who was now on medication for depression and blamed himself for how his sons' lives turned out. 'Donnie' had struggled over the years, wanting to relieve the pain of the abuse but not knowing how. He said he had not sought redress or compensation because he could not bring himself to disclose. He told the Commissioner:

[It's] so sad, man ... I've never spoken to anyone about it but, one thing I used to do and it used to make me feel better about it, is I used to write it down on a bit of paper and scrunch up that bit of paper and chuck it away so I got it off my chest ... At times it becomes so overwhelming ... You know how they did that Redress thing? I didn't want to have anything to do with it because I didn't want ... people to know that this is what happened to me.<sup>739</sup>

Some male survivors in prison talked to Commissioners about how their upbringing and family circumstances had forced them to become independent and self-reliant from a young age. They told Commissioners that revealing child sexual abuse would have been seen as a weakness by their peers. They also felt a sense of shame for not being strong enough to prevent the sexual abuse from occurring. Keeping quiet was a way of maintaining the appearance of strength. 'Ross Andrew' told the Commissioner he was 12 years old when his mother died and he went into 'care'.<sup>740</sup> He said that the care arrangements were unstable and he spent some time living on the streets. 'Ross Andrew' believes that his view of the world was shaped by years of living in uncaring environments. He told the Commissioner that he had never fully disclosed the abuse before his private session. 'Ross Andrew' said he had given some information to the Forde Inquiry (the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions), but he had not provided any details of his experiences of child sexual abuse. 'I struggle talking to my partner. Why, because of shame ... Because I let them take advantage of me.'<sup>741</sup>

Many survivors in prison recalled that as a child they did not see the point of telling anyone they had been sexually abused. Many explained this was the result of the physical and social isolation they experienced growing up. In their eyes, there was no one who cared enough for them to tell. 'Calyn' told the Commissioner that in the mid-1990s he discovered that his mother's boyfriend was sexually abusing his sisters. 'Calyn' said he had 'done something about it', for which his mother had never forgiven him.<sup>742</sup> 'Calyn' said that after this, he was sent away to an agricultural school, which he referred to as a 'mission'. At the mission 'Calyn' said, one of the priests started coming into his dormitory at night to rape him. He told the Commissioner there was no way he could tell anyone and that there was little point in disclosing:

When you're hurt and you really can't express yourself to anyone in the world, especially your mum and dad ... We never asked to be brought into this world for blokes to be fucking us in the arse ... It's the most hurtful thing that could ever happen to you ... We're sitting there getting hurt and ... we don't know what to do ... They know what they're doing. They're older than us. Trying to take advantage of us kids.

We couldn't do anything about it ... so all I had to do was just shut the door and cry ... I couldn't do nothin' or speak to anyone about it ... In the bush you could shout ... as much as you want. It was like a prison ... there's nothing we could do. I mean, we can't bring our virginity back after it's been broken.<sup>743</sup>

### **'Uncontrollable', running away and non-disclosure**

Female survivors in prison at the time of their private session commonly described a sense of vulnerability and lack of support services as being barriers to disclosure. Many who had been in residential, foster or kinship/relative care – some with a history of running away or being in trouble with authorities – found it harder to disclose, even when they had someone to confide in. Female survivors who had experienced multiple episodes of sexual, physical and emotional abuse also said they found it very difficult to talk about their experiences. 'Annabelle Jane' said she grew up in 'challenging circumstances' – her mother was an alcoholic and an occasional drug user.<sup>744</sup> 'Annabelle Jane' said they did not get along and she often ran away. 'Annabelle Jane' said that when she was 11, she was sent to live with her father, who was a heroin addict. She said she ran away, was 'placed on an uncontrollable order' and made a ward of the state. 'Annabelle Jane' told the Commissioner that while she was under the care of the state, she was sent to numerous placements and sexually abused by many people, including a police officer, staff members at a children's home and her house father at a residential cottage. She said she did not tell anyone about the abuse – not even a Department of Community Services worker with whom she was on 'first name' terms – because she felt isolated and vulnerable.<sup>745</sup>

Female survivors who spoke to Commissioners in prison rarely said they had access to supportive adults before, during or after the sexual abuse. Most had experienced trauma from an early age and had learned to be self-reliant. Some reflected that this independence had prevented them from disclosing the abuse. Some said they had been abused by people who were supposed to protect them, which at the time reinforced their belief that they could not trust people in positions of authority. 'Hannah Mary' told the Commissioner, 'I pretty much lost my childhood at an early age. I had been molested by the age of seven'.<sup>746</sup> 'Hannah Mary' said she started running away from home when she was 12 and, as a result, was placed in the care of the welfare department. In her mid-teens, 'Hannah Mary' said she ended up in a government-run hostel for teenage girls. She said she went out one day and on her return home, a car stopped beside her.

She told the Commissioner that she presumed the driver thought she was a sex worker:

This person said 'get in'. It was like, nup, I'm not – I don't do that, you know. I'm on my way home. And he said 'get in the fucking car' ... Once inside the car he said to me that, 'you're only a kid ... They're not going to ask questions if they find your body in the street, you know' ... He opened the glove box. There was a gun, police badge, and the siren. He says, 'now you will do what I fucking tell you'.<sup>747</sup>

'Hannah Mary' said she did not tell anyone about being sexually abused by the police officer. She was in shock when she went back to the hostel and believed 'no one really did care'.<sup>748</sup>

### **Not understanding and telling later**

Like some other survivors, survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session sometimes told Commissioners they had not disclosed previously because they had no understanding or language to talk about child sexual abuse. These survivors often said that adult perpetrators had told them that child sexual abuse was normal. Without access to protective, supportive adults, they grew up believing them. 'Arlen' told the Commissioner how he came to understand he had been sexually abused.<sup>749</sup> He described the youth detention centre he was placed in as violent. He said he was abused by the centre doctor 'five or six [times] ... I thought it'd become protocol, you know ... I thought it was the norm ... I thought it wasn't just me. I thought every prisoner undertook it'.<sup>750</sup>

'Arlen' recalled how he was in his twenties and laughing with his friends about things that went on at the centre when he 'brought up what the doctor used to do'. 'Arlen' said he was shocked that 'no one else seemed to be laughing'. He said:

I suppose it's just one of those things that ... you knew it was wrong, but it was a doctor ... I don't know what happened to me with other things at [the youth detention centre] were right or wrong, because I don't know what to this day, what still was right or wrong, you know. There probably could have been a dozen things.<sup>751</sup>

## **8.5.3 Responses to disclosure at the time of the abuse**

Survivors in prison at the time of their private session sometimes told Commissioners about how institutions and others responded to their disclosures that they were sexually abused as a child. The majority spoke in general terms about what happened at the time of disclosure. Some survivors told us about their experience of disclosing when they were living in youth detention centres. Many of these survivors said they were not taken seriously, disbelieved or dismissed. Some attributed this lack of validation to their past. They said their previous actions and behaviours – running away, being seen as 'uncontrollable' or getting into trouble – influenced how people listened and responded to them. Others said the culture of the institution in which they disclosed was brutal and that child sexual abuse was overlooked.

## Experiences of male survivors

### **‘So man up and deal with it’**

Male survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session described youth detention centres as harsh environments. Survivors rarely said that they found supportive or protective adults in whom they could confide in these settings. ‘Kent’ told the Commissioner that after he was sexually abused by a neighbour, he became ‘uncontrollable’ and started avoiding school.<sup>752</sup> He said he was sent to a youth detention centre, where he was sexually abused by older children in detention. ‘Kent’ described himself as ‘timid’ and the centre as ‘confronting’. After ‘Kent’ told an officer at the centre that ‘the boys are picking on me’, the bullying increased. ‘Kent’ described being reluctant to attempt further disclosures of the sexual abuse after the officer responded, ‘if you weren’t such a little prick you’d be at home with your parents. So man up and deal with it’. ‘Kent’ told the Commissioner that the officer’s response:

threw me that bad that I thought, what am I going to do here? So I just went into shock, and didn’t want to talk no more. I would have opened up to him, but the response he gave me just threw me and I thought, I’m not talking to these people. If I say something here, I could die ... I was in a lot of fear.<sup>753</sup>

### **Laughter and looking away**

Some survivors said they tried to disclose the sexual abuse to institutional authorities, but that they were dismissed or accused of lying. This was especially common among survivors who said they were living on the streets or were thought to be ‘uncontrollable’. Some said that disclosing the abuse had made them vulnerable to further abuse. ‘Braddon’ told the Commissioner his parents split up when he was very young and from the age of two he was ‘passed around my family ... I thought it was normal’.<sup>754</sup> ‘Braddon’ said he was a ‘rebellious kid’ and in the late 1980s, was declared ‘uncontrollable’ and placed in the first of many children’s homes. He told the Commissioner he ran away from one of the homes and was hitchhiking when a man ‘picked me up and drugged me and raped me in a motel’. ‘Braddon’ said this experience badly affected him, and he started committing crimes. Before long, he said he was placed in a youth detention centre, where he said another youth rubbed semen all over his lips ‘with hot chilli so it stuck’. Braddon said he disclosed the incident to officers at the centre, but they just laughed at him. Later, he said he was bashed for being a ‘dog’. ‘Braddon’ told the Commissioner he tried to talk to the counsellors at the centre about the sexual abuse, but all they did was give him sleeping pills.<sup>755</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners that when they were children, adults treated them as though they were not worthy of sympathy or support. When they did attempt to disclose the sexual abuse, they were laughed at. 'Jeffrey' told the Commissioner that, from a young age, he would run away from home and skip school so he could be with his friends.<sup>756</sup> By the age of 11, 'Jeffrey' said he had been picked up by police several times for stealing and break-and-enter offences, and was sent to a youth detention centre. He said he was one of the youngest boys there. 'Jeffrey' recalled to the Commissioner that one day, when he was in the recreation room, some of the older boys came in and blocked all the exits and then one of them anally raped him. 'Jeffrey' said the boy threatened him with serious harm if he told anyone. 'Jeffrey' told the Commissioner how for days afterwards, the boy would laugh at him:

He used to joke about it with other boys and that used to eat me up inside. I knew it wasn't right and if I told someone I'd probably get in trouble. I didn't know how to approach the situation, and then it got the better of me.<sup>757</sup>

'Jeffrey' said that after about a week he disclosed the rape to a staff member who laughed. 'I said, "This isn't a joke", and I broke into tears.'<sup>758</sup>

### **Victims were 'liars' and witnesses 'didn't care'**

Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session often told Commissioners that guards and prison officers had overlooked incidents of children in youth detention being sexually abused by children with harmful sexual behaviours or adult perpetrators. In some cases, survivors said that guards and officers had noticed what was happening and told the victim they assumed it was consensual, and in other cases, 'they [the guards and officers] didn't care what happened'.<sup>759</sup>

Male survivors who said they were young when they entered youth detention often recalled being targeted by older boys. 'Joshua Michael', who was born in the early 1990s, told the Commissioner that from around the time he was in Year 7 at school, he 'got in with the wrong crowd, starting stealing, [and doing] break-and-enters'.<sup>760</sup> 'Joshua Michael' said he was remanded in a youth detention centre where violence was common. One day, some of the older boys invited 'Joshua Michael' into a room to play cards. 'Joshua Michael' said that when he got there, he was held down and raped by a boy he had considered a friend. 'Joshua Michael' said he cried out during the attack, but nothing happened. He told the Commissioner that when one of the guards came to see about the noise, he did nothing to stop the attack and just told the boys to keep it down.



Male survivors who had been in youth detention or punished for some other behaviour, such as not going to school, said they were often accused of lying or dismissed when they disclosed the sexual abuse to authorities or their parents. Some thought it was because of their previous behaviour that their voices and opinions were not valued. 'Pierce' told the Commissioner he did not have the 'best upbringing'.<sup>761</sup> His family moved states and schools and his father, who was violent and a heavy drinker, died by suicide when 'Pierce' was 13. 'Pierce' said he got into trouble with the police and was sent to a youth detention centre where one of the guards singled him out, giving him lollies and extra privileges. Other children in the centre noticed. On one occasion, 'Pierce' said he woke to find the guard was standing beside his bed with his pants down. Although 'Pierce' dismissed the incident, he said his cellmate made a complaint about it. A year later, when he was in a different youth detention centre, 'Pierce' was called to an inquiry:

[I was put] in a room with people everywhere from human services. I wasn't allowed to have any family there. I had no one to help me and I got sat in the middle of the room and grilled and told I was a liar and a juvenile delinquent and just, shit that still affects me to this day. There was workers that quit their jobs and everything over this and they're still talking on Facebook to this day 'cause they were horrified with how it got swept under the carpet. But that's what happened – it got swept under the carpet and I was just the young troubled kid and that's all I got told was: 'It's your fault. You're lying'.<sup>762</sup>

## Experiences of female survivors

### **They didn't listen, they didn't care**

Many female survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners that disclosing their experiences of child sexual abuse had been a difficult and in some cases 'horrible' experience. Many said their disclosures were either ignored or dismissed. It was rare for institutional authorities to show any concern for their wellbeing. Survivors who were living on the streets or in residential or foster care at the time of the sexual abuse often said they were abused again after they disclosed. Some began engaging in risky behaviour.

'Ruth May' told the Commissioner she reported the sexual abuse to police after being raped on her 13th birthday.<sup>763</sup> She did not recall whether charges were laid. After this, 'Ruth May' said she was sexually abused by one of her foster carers and, at the age of 15, she started working in a bar as a stripper. She told the Commissioner that after she was raped:

I became, I guess, a bit promiscuous because of that. I sold myself off cheap, I guess. Not selling myself in the way of being a whore or something, but I just gave it away, like it didn't mean anything to me anymore.<sup>764</sup>

Like male survivors, female survivors who said they had been 'difficult' as teenagers often said that their disclosures were not taken seriously. This was especially the case when the perpetrator was a police officer or had friends or family who were. 'Peta' said she was raped by her boyfriend's father, a police officer, who would give her and her friends drugs and paint to sniff.<sup>765</sup> She said that she reported the rape to police in a nearby suburb, but that at the time no action was taken against the man. 'Peta' told the Commissioner she thought her reputation as a substance user and the perpetrator's position as a police officer protected him from prosecution. Years later she said she was contacted by police to give evidence after three or four other girls were sexually abused by the same perpetrator. 'Peta' told the Commissioner she cooperated, but did not go to court. 'I never fronted. I was too scared'.<sup>766</sup>

Other female survivors said that police were not equipped to listen to children who did not have the language or understanding of child sexual abuse to clearly explain themselves. Many of these survivors were very young when they were first sexually abused and did not understand that what had happened was wrong. Like other survivors, many found the experience of reporting to police 'horrible'.<sup>767</sup> 'Angie' told the Commissioner she was six years old when she was sexually abused at school by a stranger on the school grounds.<sup>768</sup> She said she disclosed the abuse to her teacher immediately, and recalled that there were 'police everywhere' when her mother picked her up from school. 'Angie' said she was neither asked for a statement nor taken to hospital. She told the Commissioner that as a six-year-old, she did not know the words for genitalia and struggled to explain what had happened to her mother, who only spoke Serbian. 'Angie' remembered feeling 'ridiculed' after the incident and the police being 'just awful' to her:

I definitely wasn't [taken seriously]. To think that they didn't take me to hospital. That's unforgiveable. Just because I couldn't explain exactly what had happened, there may well have been some forensic evidence to be taken – definitely.<sup>769</sup>

## Disclosure in prison

Female survivors often told Commissioners that there was an understanding among women in prison that many of them had been sexually abused at some time in their lives. Some said they were supported and encouraged by other prisoners to talk about the experience of child sexual abuse. 'Dani' told the Commissioner that she was 16 when she was raped while living in a youth shelter.<sup>770</sup> 'Dani' said she disclosed the rape to the youth workers at the shelter at the time, but 'freaked out' and did not follow it up. After a series of violent relationships, 'Dani' said she 'started drinking and got really suicidal'. She spoke to the Commissioner from jail where she was serving a lengthy custodial sentence. 'Dani' said she had talked about the child sexual abuse in jail and 'one of the ladies convinced me to tell someone'. She told the Commissioner:

Being in here and talking to the girls I realise it was kind of the cycle that you get in. I even kind of felt like it was my fault for some reason. That's just how I felt. I didn't have anyone to tell me.<sup>771</sup>

#### 8.5.4 Survivors' reactions to what happened when they disclosed

Many survivors who spoke to Commissioners in prison described being angry and hurt by the responses they received when they disclosed. Some were especially distressed when their experiences of child sexual abuse were minimised or passed off as 'consensual'. 'Shane' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by a man who had knocked him off his bike when he was 11.<sup>772</sup> He said he began 'playing up', became angry and withdrawn, and spent almost all of his teenage years in boys' homes and youth detention centres, where he had further experiences of sexual abuse. 'Shane' told the Commissioner he discovered from his records that the staff knew he was being sexually abused. He said what he found most hurtful was how they dismissed the abuse as consensual homosexual activity:

So I suppose that if you are being held down under a bed, made to suck someone's dick or for them to take you into the toilet block so they can fuck you is being 'gay' in his eyes? Or the fact that if you did not do what they wanted you to do, you get held down late at night in the dorm or got gang-raped anyway, or they gave you a good bashing?<sup>773</sup>

Many of these survivors said the responses they received to their disclosures affected their capacity to trust adults, especially adults in positions of responsibility. Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session had a longstanding distrust of authority. 'Pierce' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by a custodial officer at a youth detention centre and that he had been harassed and accused of lying after others found out.<sup>774</sup> He told the Commissioner, 'I still struggle to this day because of the way they made me feel. I wasn't lying. I had no reason to lie. But for them to do that, fuck I was only 14 ...They didn't give me a chance'.<sup>775</sup>

Like other survivors, those survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session expressed frustration that their disclosures had not been heard. Some believed that the person who had sexually abused them had continued to abuse other children after their disclosures were ignored. 'Krystle' told the Commissioner that her adoptive stepmother was violent towards her, in part because she was Aboriginal.<sup>776</sup> 'Krystle' said that she began to smoke and drink alcohol and, when she was 12 or 13, she was picked up by police, charged and made a ward of the state. The court appointed a psychologist, who 'Krystle' said groomed her by giving her drugs and alcohol. 'Krystle' told the Commissioner that the psychologist soon began to sexually abuse her and that the abuse continued until she was 18.

'Krystle' said she moved to the city to escape the psychologist, worked as a sex worker and developed a drug habit. When she was 19, she said she moved interstate, but was convicted of a crime and given a long jail sentence. 'Krystle' said she has always been upfront about her sexual abuse and has disclosed it to many adults in authority, including a child probation officer who 'didn't believe me and smacked me with a ruler'. 'Krystle' said the psychologist continued to sexually abuse other children. She told the Commissioner he was eventually convicted in 2013 of a great number of child sexual abuse charges, although her abuse was not included. 'Krystle' was angry that no one had listened to her or taken her seriously when she had disclosed the abuse.

She said she believed that if someone had listened to her, the perpetrator might have been stopped before abusing so many other children. 'Krystle' reflected on what happened after she told a custodial officer:

So that's 2003 and I was still crying out for help and that wasn't listened to ... Could have stopped those ... kids from being hit [abused] ... that's 10 [more] years he's had a reign of terror. And I told that lady [custodial officer] to do something about it and nothing was ever done.<sup>777</sup>

'Krystle' said that interstate police had later contacted her for a statement in relation to the psychologist, which made her angry. She said to them:

Why has it taken this long for you to do something when he raped and abused me ... That's why I've tattooed my body, because I suppose it's like self-harm because it's something to take the pain away ... I said, 'What do you want to talk to me now after I've done so much jail and [continually] asked for help?'<sup>778</sup>

## 8.6 Wellbeing

---

### 8.6.1 Survivors' descriptions of their lives

Almost all survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session (99.6 per cent) told Commissioners about their wellbeing at the time of the private session and in the past. Many spoke about how they had come to be imprisoned, as well as other challenges they had faced. Like other survivors, those who were in prison often spoke about the terrible pain and sense of shame that they carried with them through life after their experience of child sexual abuse.

Many of these survivors referred to childhoods marked by multiple traumatic experiences. Most had complex or difficult childhoods involving the child welfare system, abuse and neglect by family, running away and/or youth detention. They often told Commissioners about abuse and neglect by members of their family, and some also gave accounts of violence, substance use or crime by family members. Some told Commissioners about being placed in multiple different foster care families and some talked about how they were continually moved between different family members. Many reflected on how this lack of stability in their living arrangements impacted on their schooling, their ability to make friends and their ability to feel part of their community.

For many survivors in prison, child sexual abuse within an institutional context was one of multiple childhood traumas. Frequently these survivors did not distinguish between the different traumas they experienced. When survivors spoke about the impact of sexual abuse, they tended not to distinguish between sexual abuse that occurred in institutions – such as foster care or youth detention – and sexual abuse by family members or family friends.

## Mental illness

Most of the survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners they experienced mental illness and other psychological problems due to the ongoing trauma of child sexual abuse. Like other survivors, the large majority (94.9 per cent) talked about the impact of the ongoing trauma on their mental health. Survivors in prison often described symptoms of mental illness, including self-harm, suicide attempts, addiction, sleeping problems, flashbacks and triggers. Many spoke about dealing with anger and some said they were in prison for offences related to violence. These survivors also commonly said they had been diagnosed with mental illnesses, including post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression and anxiety. Many survivors had been prescribed drugs for mental illness, including antipsychotic medication. Some survivors were unsure about their diagnosis or the medication they had been prescribed to manage their condition. Some survivors had been told their diagnosis of mental illness was a result of their previous drug use.

## Involvement in crime

Most of the survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session said that they had been involved with the criminal justice system for many years. Many had been in prison previously. Survivors told Commissioners they were imprisoned for a range of different crimes. Often, the crimes were linked to substance use. Some survivors were serving long sentences. A minority had committed sexual offences, including offences against children. When reflecting on how they came to be incarcerated, many told Commissioners that they saw a link between their experiences in childhood and their involvement in crime as an adult. The childhood experiences they spoke of included sexual abuse in institutions, as well as other abuse and challenges. Sometimes their incarceration was because they used drugs or other substances to cope with the abuse and other trauma, which then led to crime. Several survivors told Commissioners that they had attacked people for reasons related to their experience of sexual abuse. A small number of male survivors who had committed murder told Commissioners that sex or the suggestion of sex had acted as a trigger to committing the crime.

Some survivors told us that later in life, they had attacked the person who had sexually abused them as a child. Others attacked people who had hurt them, their children or others. 'Hannah Mary' was adopted as an infant in the mid-1960s.<sup>779</sup> She told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by a neighbour when she was seven. 'Hannah Mary' described how the man had put a gun to her head and threatened her by saying, 'you'll live with me, and this [the abuse] will happen every day. Or, you see me once a week, and I won't kill your parents or your dog'. 'Hannah Mary' said she did not tell anyone what the neighbour was doing to her, or what he had threatened, and the abuse continued. 'Hannah Mary' told the Commissioner how it felt when she went to the neighbour's house, not too long before her private session, and physically assaulted him. Even though she received a fine, 'going and hitting the guy that molested me, that was really good ... I was vulnerable, and I couldn't defend myself. He's now vulnerable'. She said she told the police that he had sexually abused her as a child, but they said it was 'hearsay' and they would not be investigating the matter any further.<sup>780</sup>

Male and female survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session tended to describe different paths through the criminal justice system. Female survivors tended to be less likely to give accounts of lifetime involvement in the criminal justice system. They were less likely to tell Commissioners they had spent time in youth detention and appeared to have spent less time in adult prisons compared to male survivors. Female survivors were also typically younger than their male counterparts: on average, female survivors were 36.8 years old at the time of their private session, compared with an average age of 42.1 years for male survivors.

Male survivors often told Commissioners they had been involved in the criminal justice system from a young age and had spent time in youth detention. Many said that as children or teenagers they were angry or had become angry or 'uncontrollable', running away or causing trouble. Many attributed this behaviour to having been sexually abused and experiencing other trauma within the family. Some found self-medication in drugs or alcohol at a young age and ended up getting involved in crime, such as theft and drug offences. Those who had been sexually abused in youth detention often said that the abuse exacerbated their psychological and behavioural issues and led to further criminal activity. Male survivors often said that over time, their crimes tended to become more serious, and many survivors had spent much of their adult life in prison.

'Ralph Steven' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by family acquaintances and friends when he was growing up.<sup>781</sup> He reacted by becoming a very angry child and he 'went off the rails'. He told the Commissioner that he was sentenced to youth detention in Western Australia in the mid-1990s:

[I] starting smoking pot and drinking. Ended up stealing cars and shoplifting and assaulting people and all that sort of stuff. A lot of anger ... just because I had a hard life growing up, and a lot of enemies and a lot of people targeting me.<sup>782</sup>

'Ralph Steven' said he was sent to the detention centre 13 times between the ages of 14 and 17.

## Life in prison

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session, especially males, said they had been in prison more than once. After spending time in residential or foster care and now being in prison, some survivors reflected on spending most of their lives in institutions, and told Commissioners they had become 'institutionalised'.<sup>783</sup> 'Oliver Patrick' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused in various youth detention centres in the mid-2000s.<sup>784</sup> He said he 'hadn't been in the community long enough to even start a life', having been incarcerated several times for violent crimes. 'Oliver Patrick' said he saw some benefits to being in jail: as well as having access to mental health support services, he has been able to educate himself by undertaking various courses. He told the Commissioner that after an unstable childhood, the structure and routine of life 'inside' was reassuring:

I sort of get comfortable in places like this. And it was pretty weird, even when I was getting out at certain times, and going back home, I felt like I was not at home. And every time I kept coming back in, I felt I was at home ... I'm one of them people that needs routine.<sup>785</sup>

When he spoke to the Commissioner, 'Braddon' said he had been in jail for a decade.<sup>786</sup> By the time he is due for parole in his early forties, he estimated that he will have spent nearly 30 years of his life in institutions:

You become more dependent when you're in jail. They're giving you free meals, you've got a free bed, you don't have to pay rent, they're paying you to stay here. In here you've got no worries. It's sad, I know. But that's how I see it.<sup>787</sup>

A number of prisoners told Commissioners about their struggle to readjust to life outside prison after being released, and how in some ways they felt more comfortable in prison. 'Joshua Michael' has spent most of his adult life in custody.<sup>788</sup> In the mid-2000s when he was 13, he said he was remanded to youth detention where he was raped by an older boy. He told the Commissioner he finds living in the community overwhelmingly stressful and difficult, and turns to self-harm to cope. 'I don't do it inside [jail], I do it outside ... On the inside I do it easy, don't have to stress out that much'.<sup>789</sup>

Other survivors told Commissioners they had delayed applying for parole because of the uncertainty that awaited them outside of prison life. 'Findlay' told the Commissioner he began committing crimes as a child so he could be sent to a youth detention centre and escape the physical and sexual abuse at home.<sup>790</sup> He said that when he was 13 and living in a youth detention facility, he was sexually abused by a custodial officer. Now in his thirties, 'Findlay' said he has spent most of his life in and out of prison while also battling drug addiction. He told the Commissioner, 'I'm actually scared about getting out, I can't explain'.<sup>791</sup>

Some survivors were pessimistic about their future and the likelihood of being able to maintain a positive life outside of prison. 'Dawson' said he was sexually abused in a boys' home after a difficult childhood.<sup>792</sup> Now in his early forties, he told the Commissioner he has spent more than half of his life in jail. He estimated that the longest time he's been out of jail between sentences is about six years, Dawson said:

I've done all the jails in New South Wales, I've done all the jails in South Australia. I'm at that point now, I just want to get out of jail and try and make a go of it. But I'm that institutionalised, I don't know, I'll probably spend the rest of my life in jail.<sup>793</sup>

### Attitudes to perpetrators in prison

Some male survivors described the challenges they experienced living alongside perpetrators of child sexual abuse and other sex offenders in prison. This was particularly true for prisoners residing in protection wings, which house prisoners who may be targeted by other prisoners. Some prisoners acknowledged that because they had not disclosed the details of their experience of child sexual abuse, the prison authorities were unaware of the potentially re-traumatising effect of being housed with a sex offender. Other prisoners were concerned that sentences for child sex offenders were insufficient. 'Jeffrey Christopher' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by one of his foster fathers and his football coach.<sup>794</sup> He said he had also witnessed his sister being raped in foster care, when a couple of boys had held a knife to his throat and threatened that if she struggled or screamed they would hurt him. He told the Commissioner:

I've watched a lot of different documentaries on it all, on things like that ... They reckon once you become a victim so many times, you portray that as an okay thing to do later in life or whatever. I honestly, I could never wish, I would never ever wish that on any kid. The things I witnessed, and the things that happened to me.<sup>795</sup>

'Jeffrey Christopher' said that there had been times when he had to share the prison's protection wing with paedophiles and other sex offenders. He told the Commissioner he would like to see people who sexually abuse children 'shot on sight', or at least to receive jail terms that adequately reflect the severity of their crimes against children. 'Every day I've got to look at them, knowing what they've done to some poor kid or a number of kids, or what they've done to some poor woman'.<sup>796</sup>

### 8.6.2 Sources of strength and survival

Prisoners who were survivors of child sexual abuse often told Commissioners about what had helped them to cope with the abuse and trauma they had experienced. They also spoke about what had not helped, or what could be improved.



## Looking after themselves

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session had experienced multiple traumas in their life and had been forced to be independent from a young age. Many suffered abuse or neglect as children – at home and in institutions. They had not been protected by parents or other adults, and did not feel that people cared about them. From a young age, many felt responsible for themselves and did what they could to get by and keep safe. Many ran away from their families, foster placements and residential institutions to escape abuse. They lived on the streets or found other ways to get by.

These survivors developed coping strategies and ways to survive, and these continued to shape their lives in adulthood. Many said that they were wary of other people and did not trust authorities. Some – especially males – said they were physically aggressive or put on a ‘front’ to protect themselves. ‘Ross Andrew’ told the Commissioner he had a difficult childhood and spent some time as a young teenager living on the streets.<sup>797</sup> At 14, he said, he was admitted to a youth detention centre where he was sexually abused. ‘Ross Andrew’ told the Commissioner he feels that he needs to maintain a tough exterior, particularly now that he is back in jail:

I carry this front yeah? Tattoos and the rest of it. Under it I’m hurting ... It may looking like I’m coping this well man, but I’m not. You put a mask on. It’s ‘cause I live in this bully world up there, I’ve got to go back to and not speak a word of this. The only place I cry that’s in my cell, when I’m alone.<sup>798</sup>

## Substance use

Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session often described complicated histories with drugs and other substances – some of which are detailed in Section 8.4.3. Sometimes survivors’ parents or other family members had substance abuse issues that led to the survivors’ placement in out-of-home care. Many of these survivors had begun using substances in childhood or adolescence. ‘Jeffrey Christopher’ said he started drinking alcohol and using drugs, which were initially supplied by other foster children, when he was 10, and by 13 had become a ‘full-blown junkie’.<sup>799</sup> He told the Commissioner, ‘It made me feel better about who I was ... It turned my reality just into a normal nightmare. The drugs got rid of the pain, the hatred and all that for me’.<sup>800</sup>

Many survivors said they used substances in response to having been exposed to trauma from a young age, including sexual abuse. Many survivors told Commissioners they had turned to alcohol, drugs and other substances, such as petrol or paint, at some point in their lives in an attempt to separate themselves from the pain associated with their life experiences. Some said they continued to use drugs in prison. ‘Sabrina May’ said she believed people turn to drugs and alcohol:

not because it’s a poor excuse. Behind those labels are hurt and broken people that do these things to numb themselves ... They use this as a self-medication to numb the pain ... Behind those labels is a sore, broken story that you just don’t tend to have the time to even listen to.<sup>801</sup>

Other survivors said they had tried to quit but had struggled with traumatic memories and symptoms and found that they were not quite ready to stop using. Some of these survivors felt that there were some positives to taking substances. ‘Carrie’ said she credited her drug use with getting her through life for many years.<sup>802</sup> ‘Carrie’ told the Commissioner that when she was 10, she was sexually abused by an elderly man and his adult son while doing chores to raise funds for an organisation. She also said she was raped by her stepfather when she was 13. ‘Carrie’ said she became dependent on substances to deal with her trauma, and experienced her first overdose while still in her early teens. ‘Carrie’ told the Commissioner that since she had recently stopped using drugs, memories of the sexual abuse have come back to her ‘tenfold’ and she still has nightmares about it. She said she was recently prescribed medication to treat her diagnosed mental health issues and would like to get some counselling, but does not feel quite ready to cope with therapy yet.<sup>803</sup>

Others said they had given up drugs or alcohol for a period of their lives, and a number wanted to stop taking drugs altogether. This was only sometimes successful – some survivors said they had tried to give up, but had returned to drug use when they were faced with a crisis, such as the breakdown of a relationship, unemployment or a traumatic event. Some survivors struggled to cope with everyday life after being released from prison, leading them to resume their substance use.

## Support in prison

### Mental Health

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session told Commissioners they had accessed counselling and other therapeutic services in prison. Others recognised that they needed help, but did not have access to support, and some felt they were not yet ready for professional support. Some survivors had seen mental health professionals over the years, but had not found this helpful, and others said they had accessed support, but had not disclosed the sexual abuse they experienced in childhood.

Many prisoners had seen prison counsellors and other mental health professionals, or participated in courses and programs, including anger management, rehabilitation or specific violent offender programs. Many had been diagnosed with mental illness or were receiving medication, such as antipsychotic drugs. Some survivors told Commissioners that they needed counselling not just to help deal with the impacts of sexual abuse, but also to help with other trauma they had experienced as children and/or as adults. 'Ruth May' told the Commissioner she and other female survivors of sexual abuse needed counselling and other support:

it's not just the problems of my childhood. Like, I've had recent traumatic events, like finding my mum dead and being shot at, and marrying a psychopath and then having my daughter taken from me and then ... it's just a fucking ... I just feel like I can't get any help anywhere and I'm sick of talking ... I'm sick of explaining over and over and over ... you get so tired of hearing your own story and not getting anywhere.

There needs to be better plans put in place for women especially, being that I'd say 99 per cent of the population here have gone through some sort of sexual abuse, some sort of domestic violence ... A lot of us are [in jail] because of men and poor choices.<sup>804</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners how counselling and therapy in prison had been helpful. Many of these survivors had access to specialist counsellors – such as sexual assault counsellors – who were able to help them with the trauma of the sexual abuse. 'Jeffrey' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by his father when he was a toddler.<sup>805</sup> In his childhood and teenage years, 'Jeffrey' said he was moved between foster care placements, youth detention centres and brief stays with his mother. 'Jeffrey' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused in two youth detention centres. Now in his thirties, 'Jeffrey' said he has spent most of his adult life in institutions. He told the Commissioner that although he had had counselling at various stages of his life, he had only started to open up about his experience of child sexual abuse in the last five years. 'Jeffrey' said that meeting a therapist from a specialist men's sexual assault service had made a difference:

I tried to block it and I'd talk about other things in the counselling sessions. Some days it was like a relief when I walked out of there, but then other days it brought it back and it'd just play on my mind.<sup>806</sup>

Many other prisoners also said that while they had received counselling in prison, they did not disclose the abuse until much later.

## Education

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session said they had benefited from the education and training they had accessed while incarcerated. Some said that prison had provided them with the opportunity to participate in training, including courses with a vocational focus, in addition to courses as part of their therapy and rehabilitation. Many survivors said they had struggled with education in childhood and adolescence and had left school early, but found that jail had provided them with the time and resources to develop basic skills such as reading and writing. 'Dermott' told the Commissioner he was from a 'good family ... never drunk or smoked or used drugs'.<sup>807</sup> His family was poor but 'they looked after us ... made sure we always had a roof and food and that and they sent us to school and stuff'. He said he was four or five when an older boy who was brought into his extended family started raping him. He told the Commissioner he was also later sexually abused in youth detention. After getting into trouble during primary school, 'Dermott' said he never learned to read or write, but has returned to education in prison. 'I had to learn in jail. I'm still going to school now ... I still don't know how to understand some words, or spell ...'<sup>808</sup>

## Concerns about support in prison

Commissioners also heard from survivors who felt that mental health services in prisons were focused on preventing suicide and managing medications, rather than providing the kind of long-term care some survivors felt they needed to cope with the impacts of child sexual abuse and other trauma. Many survivors said they had difficulty accessing therapeutic support in prison, sometimes because counselling was not available or was no longer available. 'Alan Sam' told the Commissioner he is no longer embarrassed about the sexual abuse he experienced and knows it is something that needs to be dealt with.<sup>809</sup> He said he is frustrated that, now he's in prison, there is no counselling service available to him.

Some survivors had concerns about the nature of the therapy they received in prison. Some told Commissioners that counsellors and courses in prison only dealt with symptoms, rather than addressing the underlying issues and triggers. Some were disappointed that the primary response to their disclosure of child sexual abuse or other problems was to be prescribed medication. Other survivors were unsure whether counselling or therapy could help them, while some did not want to talk about the abuse. 'Gene Luke' was critical of the counselling he received in prison:

Counselling is ... they try and bring the worst out of you and make you talk about it and they push you and they try and make you ... I've had counselling before and ... it's not counselling ... They try and bring the anger out of you and stuff like that ... You don't want ... you don't want this ... I don't want the anger to come out of me, you know what I mean?<sup>810</sup>

Other survivors said they were concerned about the format of counselling sessions in prison, which they understood to be primarily group-based. 'Dan Peter' told the Commissioner he did not want to bring up events of the past, including the sexual abuse, in front of others, but might consider it if the counselling was one-on-one.<sup>811</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners their recommendations for how services and support for prisoners could be improved. Some wanted more counsellors in the criminal justice system who had life experience, or who could better understand their experiences. 'Braddon' explained to the Commissioner the need for survivors to have access to counsellors with shared experiences:

Counsellors that have been through the same thing, but not like textbooks, like actually been through it. It's always better to speak to someone that's been through it than talk to someone that's read about it.<sup>812</sup>

### Lack of support outside prison

Some survivors talked to Commissioners about the challenges they had faced in the past upon release from prison. Some felt they had no support once they left prison, which was when things had started to go downhill. Many survivors said they had difficulty accessing housing after release and some had found themselves homeless. Some survivors told Commissioners how, after being released, they had become involved in drugs or had committed crimes, which had sent them back to prison. 'Renata' told the Commissioner she had a difficult childhood and had started living on the streets when she was nine or 10.<sup>813</sup> She said that when she was 12, she was sexually assaulted and brutally beaten one night in the squat where she was living by a man who had given her drugs earlier in the day. She told the Commissioner that finding long-term safe housing has always been an issue for her and that previously, she had gone back to using drugs after feeling unsafe where she lived. She said the way prisoners are released does not help:

I've never ever left here with housing. I've always ended up going in a roundabout way getting housing ... I think that would make a big difference. I think that's what pisses me off as well, like the fact that I know I can do it but when everything starts, when things start going wrong I have a tendency to just ... And leaving here, you don't leave with anything ... they pretty much kick you out the door.<sup>814</sup>

'Renata' told the Commissioner things would be better if there was more help for people before they got into trouble, instead of after.

## Justice and redress

Very few survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session discussed seeking redress or compensation with Commissioners. When prompted, survivors sometimes said they had not considered applying for compensation. Others did not know whether they would be eligible to apply. Similar to other survivors, survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session had mixed views on the value of financial compensation or an apology. 'Tamsin Jane' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused in a kinship care placement by two of her cousins, both in their mid-teens.<sup>815</sup> She said the abuse began when she was five, and continued until she was nine or 10. 'Tamsin Jane' said she was against giving victims of child sexual abuse a lump sum compensation payment:

I reckon if a lot of women come in here and tell their stories and got payouts it would literally go up in their arms ... There's no point in paying them for what's happened, it's stupid. If anything, set them up with a stable place or something ... Not just where they can take it and just blow it up. Because I know half of them who are in here, it's going to go straight up their arms. The hurt's there, why give 'em something they can increase it with, you know what I mean?<sup>816</sup>

'Tamsin Jane' also didn't see much value in an apology: 'It's not really anyone's fault, I suppose. Like some people are just sick. I don't blame anyone. It's not going to get me anywhere blaming somebody else for what happened to me'.<sup>817</sup>

Other survivors were in the process of applying for compensation, or considered doing so after speaking to the Royal Commission. Some of these survivors said they thought they could use the money to assist their children or others.

### 8.6.3 Relationships

As noted in Section 8.4.3, most survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session said they came from challenging family situations where trauma had been passed down from one generation to the next. Many described how the challenges of their relationships with their family in childhood and adolescence continued to affect the dynamics of their family relationships in adulthood. Those with children often spoke of how their relationships with their children and partners seemed to replicate the challenges they faced in their own families in childhood.

Some survivors also spoke about positive support from family and partners. Some had maintained good relationships with family and kept in touch while they were in prison. Other survivors described drawing support from one family member, such as a grandmother, sister or child who had stood by them and continued to offer support while they had become distant or estranged from other family members.

## Partners, intimate relationships and sexuality

Like other survivors, survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session described to Commissioners how their experience of child sexual abuse had affected their intimate relationships and sexuality. Some survivors told Commissioners that their experience of sexual abuse in childhood had made it hard to trust people and form personal and intimate relationships. Many said that their first sexual experiences had been violent and had occurred at an early age. Some said that their body image and sexuality had been shaped by the ridicule and humiliation that accompanied the child sexual abuse. 'Tamsin Jane' told the Commissioner:

It left me with many mental scars ... It's heartbreaking to have your body parts discovered for you, and what they do. When you kinda get to the age when you want to give it, it's already taken, and then you feel like a part of you's gone. Like, what's the point?<sup>818</sup>

Other survivors were confused about their sexuality after being sexually abused as children. This was more commonly described among males who had been abused by male perpetrators. Some questioned their sexuality and were ashamed of what had happened. 'Alan Sam' told the Commissioner he was sexually abused by male staff in youth detention centres in the 1990s.<sup>819</sup> The abuse left 'Alan Sam' wondering for years whether he was gay:

I questioned my sexuality, I done a lot of things. Because at the time it was happening, I tried not to get aroused but I did. And it was fucked. I didn't know if I was gay, I didn't know if I was straight.<sup>820</sup>

Some male survivors said they went on to have sex with men in adulthood, including other men in prison or through prostitution. 'Dan Peter' told the Commissioner that in the 1990s, he was sexually abused in youth detention by older boys, as well as by male and female custodial officers.<sup>821</sup> He said he tried to run away many times and when he eventually left state care, he lived on the streets selling sex for money, food and shelter. 'Dan Peter' told the Commissioner he always felt ashamed about what he was doing and confused about his sexuality:

I just thought being a child, you don't know what's happening. I thought it was all me and I didn't know what had gone on, and that significantly changed my life. I went from a straight child to a bisexual child having to work for money doing crime. I was never game enough to tell my parents 'cause I always thought they'd want to disown me.<sup>822</sup>

He said he had had a feeling that things 'happened' the way they did because he:

was meant to be with a male, not a female ... Then I got bashed by a heap of blokes. I ended up in hospital for a couple of days over it, and then it went from that ... to criminal activity.<sup>823</sup>

'Dan Peter' told the Commissioner he has not told his wife about his experiences of child sexual abuse or his realisation that he is gay, as he is worried she would also disown him if she found out.

## Parents in custody

Many survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session spoke to Commissioners about their children. These survivors often said their children had changed their perspective on life and had been a source of strength, though most acknowledged that it was hard to maintain a positive relationship with them while in prison. Some told Commissioners that now that their children were adults, they felt they could grandparent much more successfully than they parented. Many of the female survivors told Commissioners that at the time of the private session, their children were in the out-of-home care system or with relatives, such as a partner or grandmother. Many said they had been sexually abused in out-of-home care themselves, and feared for the safety of their own children who were in care.

‘Sabrina May’ said she was sexually, physically and emotionally abused in foster care in the late 1990s.<sup>824</sup> She told the Commissioner that she and her partner ‘just went down the wrong path’ and now her own children are in out-of-home care:

My mum thought that it was just another case of you know, Stolen Generation again. And now I’m going through the same thing again, because my children are now put in the system. So it’s ... my mother, myself and now my kids are in the system.<sup>825</sup>

‘Sabrina May’ was adamant that she will not let what happened to her happen to her own children. Her partner has now turned his life around and ‘Sabrina May’ told the Commissioner she had ‘worked like fucking hell to get these little babies back’. She said she has been to therapy and has undertaken courses in anger management, loss and grief, and drug and alcohol addiction. After three generations of her family being ‘in the system’, ‘Sabrina May’ said she hoped to be ‘the person that breaks this cycle. I would love to be’.<sup>826</sup>

A number of male survivors told Commissioners they wanted to be better fathers to their children. They knew that their periods of incarceration were difficult for their children. Some recognised the shortcomings in their parenting, which they sometimes said had led to them becoming estranged from their children. ‘Calyn’ said he had spent much of his adult life in prison and has several children from two different relationships.<sup>827</sup> He told the Commissioner, ‘My kids hate me a bit’.<sup>828</sup>



Many of these fathers wanted, upon release from prison, to turn their lives around so that they could be there for their children and be a role model. As children themselves, most of these men had not known their fathers or had difficult relationships with them, often due in part to high levels of physical violence in the home. Some said they had been abused by their stepfather or by their mother's partners. 'Findlay' told the Commissioner that his mother was often in violent relationships, and most of her partners had both physically and sexually abused him.<sup>829</sup> 'Findlay' said that after many years in prison, he wanted to break the cycle of drug abuse and criminality and be a better father to his daughters:

Obviously I've been in and out of jail and I haven't been able to fix it ... What's happened to me has made me mentally and physically stuffed really. But I'm trying. I've got two daughters and that, so somewhere in my life I've gotten better.<sup>830</sup>

### Survivor accounts: Mothers in prison

Many female survivors reflected on their lives at the time of their private session in prison. Many had spent years in and out of jail. They were isolated from their families and had little support outside jail. 'Kayla's' story, which follows, highlights common elements shared by many female survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session, including:<sup>831</sup>

- childhood trauma, including violence and family disadvantage
- struggles with substance use and addictions
- finding strength in their relationships with their children
- loss of custody of their own children
- mental health issues, including self-harming behaviours.

### **‘Kayla’ and mothers in prison**

‘Kayla’ told the Commissioner, ‘I used to come into jail ‘cause I thought it was safe’. ‘Kayla’s’ family had migrated to Australia in the early 1980s, when she was a young girl. She described her mother as ‘very dependent ... she didn’t have any friends, didn’t have any money’. ‘Kayla’ said her mother placed her and her siblings into care because of the physical abuse that was occurring at home.

‘Kayla’ was placed in multiple foster homes from the age of 11. At 12, she became a ward of the state and was placed in a residential home. ‘Kayla’ said she was sexually abused at the home by priests pretending to conduct ‘reflex tests’. She told the Commissioner she did not feel able to disclose the abuse to her mother.

In the next foster care home, ‘Kayla’ said her foster mother was violent and locked her in her room. ‘Kayla’ ran away. After being removed from this home, she said she received little support and ended up on the streets:

I was about 13 I think when I was on the streets ... I went to youth shelters.  
And then sometimes I’d have to sleep outside ... [My mother] tried to take  
me in a couple of times but it just didn’t work.

At 13, ‘Kayla’ was put into a youth services unit for children, which she described as ‘just a place for older junkies to just move from house to house and just use the kids until they’d get kicked out. And that’s what happened ... I met some bad people’.

‘Kayla’ said she developed phobias and started to self-harm. At 19 she had her first child. ‘Kayla’ told the Commissioner her children have made her stronger and more resilient. ‘[I] tried to kill myself ... but once I had my kid, my first kid, that was it ... I wouldn’t do that anymore’.

‘Kayla’s’ children spent time in foster care, and at one point she said they told her they were being sexually abused. ‘Kayla’ said she was charged with kidnapping them. With some legal support, ‘Kayla’ had fought hard to regain care of her children and they now live with her mother.<sup>832</sup>

## Survivor accounts: Male survivors in prison

Many survivors who spoke to Commissioners in prison had experienced difficulties in their lives from an early age. In their private sessions, they reflected on their lives and described multiple experiences of trauma and neglect. They also described how adults and institutions had not looked after them. ‘Shaun Michael’s’ story, which follows, highlights common experiences shared by many male survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session.<sup>833</sup> This includes:

- multiple childhood traumas, including child sexual abuse, violence, neglect and family disadvantage
- intergenerational trauma in families that had multiple and generational disadvantage
- large portions of their lives being spent in prison
- struggles with substance use and mental illness
- troubled relationships with others
- certain positive aspects of prison and a desire to help others.

### **Men in prison: Connection to culture and connection to others**

‘Shaun Michael’ grew up in Brisbane in the 1980s. He said his father was a ‘cruel’ and ‘violent’ man, although he ‘tried his best ... to be a father’. ‘Shaun Michael’ said his mother was one of the Stolen Generations. ‘Shaun Michael’ was not interested in attending school and missed out on an education. He said he spent his time hanging around with his cousins, wagging school and smoking marijuana. He said the police would ‘always harass us kids’ because they were on the streets, not because they were committing crimes. He told the Commissioner he thought the police, the courts and the jails were racist.

‘Shaun Michael’ said that in his youth he spent 12 months in a remand centre with a violent culture. He said because of his young age, he was beaten by older boys. He also said he was sexually abused by staff in an area he described as the ‘dungeons’. ‘Shaun Michael’ told the Commissioner he still finds it difficult to talk about the sexual abuse, which had a major impact on him: ‘I found myself going through this fucking trauma for over a year ... I had no idea ... I lost it. I couldn’t give a fuck what happened ... I went crazy’.

Now in his thirties, ‘Shaun Michael’ told the Commissioner he was angry and damaged because of what was done to him as a child and because of the victimisation he continues to experience each time he is released from jail. ‘Shaun Michael’ said he had spent much of his life in jail, including for drug-related offences. He told the Commissioner he had been diagnosed with drug-induced paranoid schizophrenia.

‘Shaun Michael’ said he has four children he is very proud of, but his intimate relationships have been fragmented and he finds it difficult to trust anyone. He relies on himself and keeps to himself. ‘When it comes [to] people ... [who] try to get close to me I brush it off.’

‘Shaun Michael’ told the Commissioner that his relationships with his siblings are difficult too, but in jail he has been able to connect with other Aboriginal men. ‘I love my culture, I respect it. If it wasn’t for jail, I probably wouldn’t know my culture.’

Because of his traumatic experiences of abuse, ‘Shaun Michael’ said he understands the pain other men are going through and he tries to help the younger inmates:

Most of these kids [in jail] are fatherless and I try to be a big brother or a father to all them... There’s nothing more important to be a great father and a good leader. That’s all I look forward to.

He also said he tries to intervene and stop them getting into further trouble inside:

They’ll say and do things in here that are just a bit stupid because it’s a damaged place to be... Saying something [won’t help them]. They forget, so I’ll quickly interact and I’ll get in there ... I haven’t stopped trying. I always try.

‘Shaun Michael’ said when he was in the remand centre, his mother stressed how important it was to have an education and to read the Bible. He told the Commissioner he taught himself to ‘read and write through the Bible ... I’ve never been to school’. ‘Shaun Michael’ said he still reads the Bible, which helped him cope.

When he gets out of jail, ‘Shaun Michael’ said he wants to be respected for his achievements inside, teaching himself to read and write and undertaking a range of courses. He said he hopes to continue helping young Aboriginal people by being an advocate for child safe programs and policies:

I want to reach out to the kid inside of me and always want to protect the kid I fucking couldn’t save. I was just a kid. I look out here [in jail] at the young fellas [and] it’s like looking at myself and I’m trying to protect myself. It’s a constant reminder of me.<sup>834</sup>

## 9 Survivors' suggestions for change

### 9.1 Overview

---

Many survivors who attended private sessions said they had waited a long time to find an organisation they could trust to listen to their experiences with sensitivity and respect. Many were motivated by a strong sense of responsibility to do something that might help prevent what happened to them from happening to other children. Many had thought hard about what they wanted to tell Commissioners and were eager to share their suggestions about how children could be better protected against child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. Commissioners also encouraged survivors to talk about their ideas for change.

Chapter 9 describes survivors' suggestions for change, identified through an analysis of a sample of 74 accounts provided by survivors during private sessions. Suggestions from survivors who formed part of the samples in Chapters 4 to 8 have also been included.

### 9.2 Learning from survivors' knowledge and experience

---

Survivors came to the Royal Commission with specific goals. They wanted to share their story of child sexual abuse. Many also wanted to tell Commissioners about what they thought was wrong and what needed to change. By listening to survivors in private sessions, the Commissioners heard suggestions from those with first-hand experience about how institutions and society could better protect children from sexual abuse in the future.

Many survivors stressed that their key motivation for attending a private session was to tell Commissioners about their ideas for change. 'Merle' said she thought change would happen more quickly if survivors' voices and experiences were given greater prominence.<sup>835</sup>

Why I'm here – or why I put my name down to come forward – is because I want to see change. I don't think it's happening quick enough, and I think there's a lot of people out there just getting the bucks and not doing the work. I feel that some of the people that have walked the walk should be involved on boards and in making decisions. They probably need the training for it, but I think they need to get people that have actually experienced what we've been through.<sup>836</sup>

Other survivors drew attention to the potential costs inflicted on future generations of children and young people if the impacts of child sexual abuse are not adequately addressed now. They told Commissioners that child sexual abuse had a personal, social and economic cost. Some spoke of the immediate and long-term effects of trauma on the development of children's brains, and called for greater community awareness about the physical and behavioural impacts of child sexual abuse. Other survivors were more concerned with the broader social and economic impacts, noting the many thousands of people who have not fulfilled their economic or social potential because they were sexually abused as a child. 'Roslyn' spoke to the Commissioner about the societal and individual impacts of child sexual abuse.<sup>837</sup>

What is the economic factor? Which sounds terrible, but the economic and intellectual loss of this kind of stuff to society ... The people, the shining people we could have ... My main reason is to say these things, about the killing of souls, and the killing of potential.<sup>838</sup>

Other survivors were interested in taking what they had learned at the private session back to their families and communities. They felt that they could benefit from what the Royal Commission had learned about child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, and especially its impacts. 'Jody' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by some other children on an Aboriginal mission during the 1960s and 1970s. She said she carries the burden of bad memories and lost opportunities.<sup>839</sup> 'Jody' said she is always looking for opportunities to improve herself and the community around her, and she believed that knowledge about child sexual abuse and intergenerational trauma could help her and her community heal:

The reason I ask is that I'll be able to say, 'Where do I fit in that spectrum of issues for kids?' And will that help me be a better grandparent? Because I can't do that for my kids but I can do it for my grandkids.<sup>840</sup>

## 9.3 Preventing child sexual abuse

---

Many survivors told Commissioners about what they thought should be done to stop child sexual abuse from occurring in the future. Their suggestions varied and included changes needed in social and community attitudes, changes required to institutional policies and practices, and increased support and education for families and children.

### 9.3.1 Society and culture

Many survivors talked to Commissioners about the role of improved community understanding of child sexual abuse in better protecting children and preventing abuse. Many felt the general community held the perception that child sexual abuse was a problem of the past, or was confined to particular institutions, such as orphanages or the Catholic Church. Survivors believed the community could benefit from understanding the prevalence of child sexual abuse in contemporary institutions such as school and out-of-home care, and that this may help people understand that children today are still at risk of sexual abuse. 'Marcelle' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused in a Catholic home in the mid-1960s.<sup>841</sup> She said she was concerned that people in the community believe child sexual abuse is a thing of the past and relatively rare these days. She felt it was better to be safe than sorry:

Abuse still happens here in Australia and all over the world, still to this day. It's better to report something that turns out to be a false alarm than to take the chance on a child's wellbeing.<sup>842</sup>

Volume 2, *Nature and cause* details our recommendation for a prevalence study to better understand the extent of and risk factors for child maltreatment, including sexual abuse.

Other survivors believed that the community held misconceptions about perpetrators of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, and these misconceptions may be increasing children's vulnerability to sexual abuse. In particular, survivors commonly told Commissioners it was important to challenge the incorrect belief that child sexual abuse is most often perpetrated by someone not known to the child, known as 'stranger danger'. 'Jackson' attended a private session with his mother 'Lindy' to tell the Commissioner about his experience of sexual abuse by the director of a short film that 'Jackson' had auditioned for.<sup>843</sup> 'Jackson' told the Commissioner:

Everyone tells you about stranger danger and stuff, and don't trust strangers, and you kind of just get used to it. But sometimes they're not strangers. So it's hard to tell who to trust and who not to trust ... It's not just strangers on the street that are trying to do bad things.<sup>844</sup>

Some survivors told Commissioners they wanted the community to know that perpetrators in institutions did not fit a stereotypical mould. Some believed that sexual abuse could be prevented if children and adults better understood that perpetrators could be engaged in a wide range of roles within institutions, rather than only in roles that received media attention, such as priests or teachers. 'Jason Michael' told the Commissioner that before coming to the Royal Commission, he had never discussed his experience of sexual abuse with anyone.<sup>845</sup> 'Jason Michael' said he was sexually abused by a doctor during the 1950s, and he would have been content to maintain his silence if not for the recent media coverage of child sexual abuse. 'Jason Michael' said he saw 'priest after priest after priest' on TV being charged with offences, but no mention of doctors or nurses. He said he came forward to set the record straight, and after that, 'I'll just go back to being me. I don't think I've got it out. It's been there. I've never taken much notice of it, but you people wanted to know something so I thought, well, it might help'.<sup>846</sup>

Other survivors felt the community could benefit from more education about the nature of child sexual abuse, and particularly grooming. Many felt that increasing community understanding about the more subtle aspects of child sexual abuse may help community members identify precursors to abuse and stop abuse happening. Many parents who attended a private session to describe their child's experience of sexual abuse said they were distressed when they found out the whole family had been groomed by the perpetrator – something they often only recognised in retrospect. 'Summer' and her husband 'Pete' have three boys, the eldest two with disability.<sup>847</sup> 'Summer' told the Commissioner that all three of her sons were sexually abused by the respite carer who cared for them for a few hours each fortnight. 'Summer' said she and 'Pete' were completely unaware of what the carer was really up to. 'Summer' said that she initially had reservations about the carer, but he quickly put her mind at ease:

He was the best carer that we'd ever had. He brought toys for the kids to play with, he brought craft activities for the kids to play with. He was very engaging with them ... He did a pretty good job of grooming us as much as he did the kids.<sup>848</sup>

One evening, ‘Summer’ and ‘Pete’ went out and left their children in the care of the respite carer. They received a text from him telling them to take their time and stay out longer, but they decided to come home early anyway. When they arrived home and after the carer had left, ‘Summer’ said they discovered he had sexually abused their six-year-old son. ‘Summer’ told the Commissioner she thought there needed to be more training opportunities for parents to understand child sexual abuse.<sup>849</sup>

Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe* details our recommendations targeted at community prevention initiatives.

### 9.3.2 Institutions

Many survivors described what they thought institutions could be doing to better prevent child sexual abuse. One of the most common suggestions was for institutions to improve the background checks and screening of adults wishing to work or volunteer with children, to make it harder for potential perpetrators to access children. Many survivors who had been sexually abused in out-of-home care also felt that checks and screening of foster carers were important, and that the screening should extend to other people who might come into the home, such as the foster carer’s extended family and friends. Some survivors noted the limitations of the background and screening checks, recognising that people who were motivated to sexually abuse children would find their way around even the best-designed systems. ‘Ralph Steven’ said: ‘People can be untrustworthy, manipulative ... I’ve learned the hard way ... Watch ‘em very closely, and don’t ever trust ... anybody’.<sup>850</sup>

Recommendations related to improved background checks and screening of people working with children can be found in our *Working With Children Checks* report, as well as in Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe*.

Survivors commonly cited organisational culture as one of the factors that contributed to their vulnerability to sexual abuse. Many suggested that for organisations to become more child safe, organisational cultures needed to change. ‘Helena’ told the Commissioner she was the victim of bullying and sexual abuse by other children at school during the late 1980s.<sup>851</sup> She said the boys’ behaviour was generally accepted at the school. Boys would harass the girls in various ways: sexualised comments, teasing about their developing bodies, lifting up their skirts to expose their underwear and peering down their shirts to see their breasts. ‘Helena’ said that one particular boy would sit in the seat in front of her in class, make sexually suggestive comments, and would turn around and fondle her breasts, or lean back to touch her thighs. She said that the boy digitally penetrated her a number of times, and that she told him to stop, but not knowing how to speak about sexual abuse made it very hard to disclose. She told the Commissioner:



I wish the culture at my school hadn't been that way, because I think if it had been named, sexual harassment and that's not okay ... I might have had a language that I felt like I could use. There was no language other than 'girls, you need to be quiet'.<sup>852</sup>

Some survivors, especially men who had been sexually abused by one or more male perpetrators, reflected that institutional attitudes towards sexuality may have increased their vulnerability to abuse. These survivors suggested that institutions develop more open, inclusive attitudes towards sex and sexuality, and that these topics be discussed in an age-appropriate way with children. Some survivors believed that these changes may leave children who were curious about sex or were questioning their sexuality less vulnerable to perpetrators. 'Joey' told the Commissioner he knew he was gay by his early teens, but could not discuss this with his family.<sup>853</sup> 'Mum thought it was wrong; Dad thought it was disgusting.' 'Joey' said this made him an easy target for his Sunday school teacher, who groomed him with gifts and attended his sports events to cheer him on. Eventually, 'Joey' confided in the teacher that he was gay. 'Joey' said he could not speak to his parents or his friends, so he spoke to his teacher, and could see that the teacher was getting pleasure from what he was recounting. 'Joey' said he was later sexually abused by the teacher, and again by a choirmaster at a different church. He felt responsible for the abuse, which he said 'is part of what a predator does. They make you feel that you are partly to blame'. 'Joey' said that statistics show a high rate of suicide among Christian youth who are gay, and he believed that the problem lies with the attitudes of the churches – whether Catholic, Protestant, or other.<sup>854</sup> He said:

Really, [it's] the Church's stance on sex full-stop. The hatred of sex and the hatred of gay people ... If you're going to quote me on anything, please – [it's] to recommend that churches rethink their position ... I would like to speak out for children who are gay or lesbian; that if you grow up in a church environment where you're told all the time it's wrong, you've got to be able to speak to someone to get proper advice. [Otherwise] it leaves you vulnerable to people like [the man who sexually abused me] who will use this as a way in, and that is my concern. I was more susceptible to him because of having to deal with my sexuality. I don't want to use the word confusion because I wasn't confused. I just needed someone not to take advantage of me.<sup>855</sup>

Many survivors told Commissioners they were sexually abused while they were alone with a perpetrator. They felt that institutions could do more to ensure appropriate supervision and monitoring of staff so that it was not possible or permissible for adults to be alone with children. Many also said that the quality of supervision should be improved, especially for children in out-of-home care. Survivors talked about how adults needed to build trust with children so that children felt comfortable disclosing sexual abuse. 'Tui' told the Commissioner she thought that children needed more than one source of support:

Every child should have a circle of people that checks, in an ongoing way, all the time. So if something is astray, or there's a personality clash that's irreparable, then that child can be put in a better environment.<sup>856</sup>

Survivors who were in prison at the time of their private session also thought children needed support from outside the institution. Some did not trust people from within the institution and thought they would do better with an external advocate.

Survivors' experiences also point to how institutional practices can facilitate better care for children. Survivors who had spent some time in youth detention described what it felt like to be strip searched by adults in authority and were critical of how strip searches were conducted. Some told Commissioners that the behaviour of officers made them angry, frightened or embarrassed. Other survivors said they had been sexually abused by police or officers during strip searches or had their clothes removed as a punishment. 'Donnie' told the Commissioner:

they get you and put you in a holding cell. I can remember wrestling and fighting with them ... and they strip you off naked. And they handcuff you from behind ... one officer just sat there and watched.<sup>857</sup>

For 'Cassie', it was the behaviour of the staff after the search she did not like.<sup>858</sup> She told the Commissioner she was made to walk naked to the shower area and as she washed staff 'would make rude jokes and poke fun at my body. They would be staring at my body and I did not like it, they made me feel really uncomfortable'. Survivors' accounts of time in youth detention highlights their views that children need to be treated with respect, particularly during strip searches.<sup>859</sup>

Many survivors told Commissioners they thought that institutions could do more to train their staff in understanding the risk factors for sexual abuse so they could better identify children who might be more vulnerable to abuse. Some survivors extended this sentiment, saying that staff should be trained to identify 'uncontrollable' or 'delinquent' children who might be at risk of sexually abusing other children.<sup>860</sup> These survivors felt that if staff were better trained in what to look out for, children with potentially harmful sexual behaviours might be identified before they had the opportunity to sexually abuse. 'Velma' told the Commissioner her daughter was sexually abused by two boys at school.<sup>861</sup> She said the school had failed her daughter and all the children: 'It's not just my daughter that they let down but they let down the other children as well, not just the two boys and the girl but all the children at that school'. 'Velma' felt that staff training and education might prevent children being sexually abused in the future:

I guess what I'm saying is that the carers, like in this case the after school care staff and probably the school staff as well, like for them to be educated on how to identify kids that are being abused and to know how the child's behaviour is a little bit different ... I think education's a big part of it.<sup>862</sup>

Suggestions from survivors and parents in this area were often centred on improving understanding of children being sexually abused by children with harmful sexual behaviours, including the seriousness of the issue, and improving reporting processes and communication transparency. Some were concerned that people working with children needed to better

understand children being sexually abused by other children, and to be able to recognise the signs that it may be occurring. They also said institutions need to take seriously sexual abuse by children with harmful sexual behaviours, or the possibility of such abuse.

Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe* details our recommendations related to what institutions can do to better prevent child sexual abuse. Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours* details our recommendations related to how institutions can better prevent children from being sexually abused by other children.

### 9.3.3 Families and children

Many survivors provided suggestions about how to prevent child sexual abuse. Some survivors discussed the value of education programs targeted at children to help them to identify abusive situations and to respond appropriately. Others suggested that early intervention support should be prioritised for children and families at risk of being institutionalised.

#### Sexual abuse prevention program for children

Many survivors suggested that child sexual abuse may be prevented – or identified and stopped earlier – if children were given prevention education. For example, they thought that education could focus on identifying and naming body parts, and describing right and wrong types of touching. Many also thought that parents should be informed about what their children were learning, as this would help them to talk with their children about issues relating to sexual abuse. ‘Helena’, the victim of the bullying and sexual abuse described earlier, told the Commissioner that children needed to be taught:

It’s not okay to bully, it’s not okay to touch other people without their permission. And if somebody’s doing that, and it just makes you feel uncomfortable, or it makes you feel yucky inside, you don’t have to know, you don’t have to have the words, just tell somebody.<sup>863</sup>

Survivors and their families often said child safety education needed to adapt to the children’s needs and perspectives. Parents and carers of children with disability often told Commissioners that their children had received no or very limited sex education, and that resources for children with disability were urgently needed. ‘Nicole Jane’ told the Commissioner that her daughter was sexually abused by her friend at school.<sup>864</sup> Both of the girls had disability. ‘Nicole Jane’ said there was a ‘chasm’ between the educational resources that were currently available – which were mostly targeted towards children without disability – and what was available for children like her daughter and her daughter’s friend. She thought the educational materials might be framed in the same way as for emergency fire drills:

Even if there is material available, they don't know how to access it. Kids need to know what they can do if something at school or elsewhere makes them uncomfortable, and that information needs to be drilled into them as it is for other action plans – just like 'This is what we do in an emergency'.<sup>865</sup>

Other survivors suggested that the implementation of education programs for children needed to improve. Some told Commissioners that because child protection classes were not part of the standard curriculum, many children were not getting access to education that may help prevent sexual abuse. 'Tamsin' told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by her foster brother and foster father for several years from the age of 10.<sup>866</sup> She said she had no idea about appropriate behaviour or consent, and only understood the behaviour was wrong after a music teacher took her aside and told her she did not have to 'let the boys take advantage' of her. Though she remained grateful for the advice from her music teacher, 'Tamsin' said she wished she had been taught child protective behaviours at school, especially from a young age. She said she now provides child sexual abuse prevention education that requires parental consent to participate, but she said many children missed out on training. 'Tamsin' said:

Child protection is taught in primary schools and I've had to teach it on occasions myself, but it is voluntary for children to do it. It needs to be mandatory. You'd be surprised how many children don't [attend]. They have to go to another room when the lessons are on.<sup>867</sup>

Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe* and Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours* detail our recommendations related to sexual abuse prevention education for children. Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care* details our recommendations related to prevention education targeted specifically at children in out-of-home care, their carers and parents.

## Support for children and families

Many survivors identified a need for some kind of intervention into children's lives prior to their contact with institutions. Survivors of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care settings in particular believed that had there been better support services for their families when they were children, they may not have been placed in an institution and at risk. 'Christine' was placed in foster care after her mother re-partnered with a man who was violent towards her and her mother.<sup>868</sup> She told the Commissioner she was raped in several foster homes by her foster fathers and foster brothers. Looking back, 'Christine' wishes there had been more support and guidance available for her mother:

I always say 'why take the kid off the parent?' Maybe help the parent, if it's fixable. My mum was alcoholic and got with the wrong partners. Maybe if the people had helped her be in a better place to be able to take care of her children, maybe those things could have been avoided.<sup>869</sup>

Survivors from families who were dealing with the effects of intergenerational trauma often outlined the importance of family and cultural support as a means of preventing child sexual abuse. They suggested that agencies with responsibility for protecting children could give more support to families before removing children. Many of these people were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors, and said that the racist treatment they had experienced in the past meant they did not always trust the authorities that were supposed to help them when their situation became difficult. 'Coral' told the Commissioner that she believed in the importance of protecting and supporting children's relationship with their families.<sup>870</sup> 'They are the only ones they know and feel loved by', she told the Commissioner. 'Coral' explained that when she had needed support with her family, she was frightened to ask the Department of Community Services:

Of course I was [frightened]. Because you ask for help and then they think that you're unstable and want to take your kids. I've been in welfare. They think that my children should go there because I'm unstable and I'm drug using – they don't ask the reasons why you're drug using and what's happened. They think they've done their job – they push us out and that's it. You don't hear any support, nothing. I asked for support when I was 15 and had my son. But all they said is 'we can't help you; you need to find someone to look after him or we'll take him'. If they'd helped me then maybe I'd be in a stable house and have my kids.<sup>871</sup>

Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care* details our recommendations related to the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, and recognises the importance of cultural connection and engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in protecting children.

## 9.4 Responding to child sexual abuse

---

Survivors in private sessions commonly discussed the importance of effective institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Most survivors, regardless of the era in which they had been sexually abused, had experienced ineffective responses such as being ignored, dismissed, punished or ostracised. Survivors often suggested that children's disclosures of sexual abuse be taken seriously. Many survivors' views were summed up by 'Ida', who told the Commissioner there needs to be a safe place for people to report and it 'has to be taken seriously. Everything. It doesn't matter how insignificant it might sound, or whatever. Everything has to be taken seriously'.<sup>872</sup>

Survivors who understood that the institution had investigated an allegation of child sexual abuse often described the process as drawn-out and secretive. Many told Commissioners that these ineffective responses were damaging and sometimes re-traumatising for victims and their families. They wanted institutions to be more accountable to ensure that they were maintaining effective child safe policies. Some wanted this information to be publicly available to assist parents to make informed decisions about their child's participation in institutions. They felt this

would also encourage institutions to protect children and better respond to cases of sexual abuse, because failure to do so could affect their reputation and therefore their profits or funding. These suggestions were considered in the recommendations and Child Safe Standards presented in Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe*.

‘Rudy’ attended a private session with his father to describe his experience of sexual abuse by several older students while ‘Rudy’ was away on a two-week school excursion.<sup>873</sup> ‘Rudy’ said he told his parents about the abuse when he arrived home, and for weeks they rang and wrote to the school but heard nothing back. Over the next six months, ‘Rudy’ said they were met with delays, denials and a cursory investigation that accepted the innocence of the older boys. ‘Rudy’ said that the headmaster even accused him of inventing the story. ‘Rudy’ told the Commissioner he was distressed by the abuse, but that being disbelieved, ignored and shamed by the school hierarchy was worse:

The thing that really changed was, you feel very secure, you’re in a dome of protectiveness and then all of a sudden you’re outside of the dome and the only way to get back in is to put this stuff behind you, and I didn’t really want to do that, I wanted to resolve the issue. And they’re like, ‘If you want to get back in the dome you have to put it behind you’. In one second that whole school backing and the perception that everyone’s there to help you crumbles away ... I think to some extent it has changed my perception of the world. But not by the actions. The actions were bad but they weren’t terrible. The perception that everyone’s there to help you crumbles away.<sup>874</sup>

‘Rudy’s’ father said he wanted to see schools made more accountable and parents not left to follow up allegations of sexual abuse themselves. ‘Rudy’s’ father explained:

What happened wasn’t transparent. It followed no real process other than denial. It was extremely injurious to the child and no safeguards were followed. It was perfunctory at best ... If someone does something wrong [at the school] it doesn’t matter, because they’ve got a waiting list of two years ... I’d like to see something like a five star rating [system], particularly for private schools and it should be federally administered. Compulsory reporting and the five stars should link to funding so if you lose a star it’s like your licence and it takes you three years to get it back ... There’s got to be accountability and it’s got to be visible and it’s not at the moment.<sup>875</sup>

### 9.4.1 Communicating with parents and carers

Parents and carers who attended private sessions told Commissioners they wanted more contact with institutions after the sexual abuse occurred, so they could better understand what the institutions were doing to respond to the incident and to prevent further child sexual abuse from occurring in the future. This was especially common among parents of children who were sexually abused by a child with harmful sexual behaviours. They often wanted institutions to

share information about what had happened – including the identity of the child with harmful sexual behaviours – with other parents and carers associated with the institution so that they could make informed decisions about their own child’s involvement with the institution. These suggestions have been considered in Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting* and Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours*.

‘Kathrin’, who attended the private session with her husband ‘James’, told the Commissioner that her six-year-old daughter ‘Emily’ was sexually abused by a boy in her class.<sup>876</sup> ‘Kathrin’ said she ‘made a fuss’ and a plan was put in place to ensure that ‘Emily’ and the boy were always separated from one another. She said the principal had instructed her and ‘James’ to keep quiet about what had happened, warning that any publicity would harm ‘Emily’. They wanted to protect their daughter from bullying, but feared that if they did not speak out, the boy might try to harm other children. ‘Kathrin’ soon learned that her fears were founded – she was told by another staff member that the boy had behaved inappropriately during after-school sports. She recounted her discussion with the staff member:

Like, they’re supposed to protect our kids ... I don’t care if they think the parents are a good family, who knows what happens in someone’s home? And I said to her ‘What happens here? Did those parents get notified?’ She said ‘No, I don’t think so’ ... I believe the school still operates with no proper protocols or some sort of rules or memorandum in place ... which is unbelievable, these days.<sup>877</sup>

Some foster carers who attended private sessions said they wanted authorities to share more information about the histories of the children they were caring for. These foster carers believed that information sharing could help authorities to make more informed decisions about the welfare of their own children and other children in their care. ‘Mariel’ told the Commissioner she and her husband decided to become foster parents because they wanted to help those less fortunate.<sup>878</sup> ‘Mariel’ said they had one biological son, ‘Jayke’, who was nine years old when the family was asked to provide respite care for two children – ‘Andrew’, who was 14, and ‘Lisa’, who was two. ‘Mariel’ said the placement started smoothly, with the two older children getting along well, though ‘Mariel’ now believes that ‘Andrew’ was grooming their son. ‘Jayke’ asked one day if the other two children could sleep in his room, and ‘Mariel’ and her husband agreed to this arrangement. Years later, ‘Mariel’ said she found out that ‘Andrew’ had sexually abused ‘Jayke’ that night and had threatened him with a knife. After the sexual abuse, she said ‘Jayke’s’ mental health had deteriorated and he had been admitted to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service after experiencing a psychotic episode. ‘Mariel’ strongly believes that Family and Community Services (FACS) and other foster care agencies owe foster families the same duty of care provided to children in their care:

I understand from FACS’s point of view that they don’t know and can’t run around saying everything about the child. But I do feel they should give you enough information to make an informed decision about it. ‘Cause this is your life, you know.<sup>879</sup>



## 9.4.2 Mandatory reporting

Survivors commonly discussed the role of mandatory reporting as a way to more effectively respond to allegations of child sexual abuse. Many described negative experiences with the institution's implementation of mandatory reporting, with procedures not being followed and incidents of sexual abuse not being reported to authorities. Some proposed the list of mandatory reporters be expanded to include additional institution types, especially the churches. 'Penny' told the Commissioner she was sexually and physically abused between the ages of seven and 15 by her father, who also held an official position as an acolyte at the local Catholic church.<sup>880</sup> Recently, 'Penny' has spent a lot of time looking back on what happened to her, trying to figure out how it could have been prevented, and how other child sexual abuse can be prevented in the future. 'Penny' said she is particularly focused on the issue of confession and mandatory reporting. When 'Penny' was about eight or nine, she said her father confessed the sexual abuse to his parish priest, but nothing was done. She sees this as one of the key problems with the Catholic system:

To protect a young child should be at the heart of our faith, it should be at the heart of who we are. And someone like my father, that his privacy, or protecting his secrecy is more important than my rights, or the children following after me, is ridiculous.<sup>881</sup>

'Penny' told us that, in reality, there are many ways for priests to take action without breaking any vows, or compromising their principles and 'the sanctity of the confessional':

If priests were bound by mandatory reporting as well, they have the freedom to say – like when you go in to see a psychologist or a counsellor they say, 'Everything you tell me is confidential unless there's a threat to yourself or others'. I don't understand why they can't do the same thing.<sup>882</sup>

Royal Commission recommendations related to mandatory reporting are contained in Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting* and Volume 16, *Religious institutions*.

## 9.4.3 Criminal justice

Some survivors told Commissioners about how the criminal justice system, including police and the courts, could be improved. While some survivors said they had positive experiences of the criminal justice system, many recounted that their dealings with the police and courts had been stressful, and some said they were traumatised by the experience. Some survivors felt the process was difficult and intimidating, and this had acted as a barrier to reporting sexual abuse and pursuing justice. They also believed that this could act as a barrier to other survivors. 'Gerald' described his reasons for not proceeding with action against the Catholic Church after being sexually abused by a priest as a child.<sup>883</sup> 'It's a long drawn out court process and I become the victim and the one that's on trial. I couldn't go through that.'



Survivors who had reported the sexual abuse as children often described police processes as distressing. They wanted police to better understand what it was like for children to give evidence, and they wanted the needs of victims accommodated in a more child-friendly way. ‘Imogen’ was in her early teens when she attended her private session.<sup>884</sup> She wrote down her story for the Commissioner, and it was read out by her support person during the private session. In her statement, ‘Imogen’ said: ‘I don’t really want to say the things he did to me again, and you know why, because when I did tell, no one believed me’. ‘Imogen’ said she had been deeply traumatised by the way police interviewed her and the process of giving evidence in court. She said in her statement:

What I would like to say is that kids are not made to talk to adults without a friend or adult with them ... And kids aren’t made to sit in that small, hot room all day, without going to the toilet or recess, or fruit breaks, because you lose concentration and in the end, I just agreed with the rude man on the television [CCTV], because I couldn’t take it anymore. And lastly, kids are not liars. I never lied.<sup>885</sup>

Survivors with disability, and a number of parents of children with disability, provided suggestions about how the criminal justice system could better accommodate the needs of people with disability. Often, the survivors had an impairment that affected their ability to communicate or understand information, and they needed specialised support to assist them to do so. Many found the criminal justice system inaccessible to and unsupportive of people with such disability. Some said that police or prosecutors had told them they were not capable of testifying or being a reliable witness, meaning the case did not proceed to trial. Many of these survivors were frustrated that perpetrators were not punished and often continued to pose a risk to the community. Survivors suggested legal reform to help people with disability access the justice system.

‘Samantha’ attended a private session to describe what happened after the sexual abuse of her son, ‘Jordan’ by the school bus driver in the 2010s.<sup>886</sup> ‘Samantha’ told the Commissioner that she was told by Director of Public Prosecution staff that they would not be pursuing charges against the perpetrator in relation to ‘Jordan’. ‘Unfortunately for us, because my son was not verbal enough and wasn’t seen as a credible witness the charges relating to him were dropped.’ ‘Samantha’ suggested more support be made available for children with disability when reporting these matters to the police. Specifically, she proposed that police employ specialist staff like speech therapists or others with experience working with children with disability who might be able to help with the evidence-gathering and court process.<sup>887</sup>

Survivors who appeared as witnesses in court criminal proceedings spoke of the value of victim impact statements – and also of the damage caused if they were not allowed to present their statement. ‘Stephan’ told the Commissioner:

One of the things that helped me was the victim impact statements. What helped me was hearing the victim impact statements. Not so much mine, but hearing the others. You may as well have sat in a room and wrote them together. They were nearly exactly the same. It made you feel like, I mean it [had been] like you’re the problem, and no one else I’d heard had opened up like that. You can see everyone kind of goes through the same journey after it and during. It’s a very similar journey.<sup>888</sup>

Some survivors had views on treatment, sentencing and punishment for perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Many said they had little sympathy for the people who were responsible for destroying their childhoods. Many were angry that the perpetrator had never been to prison for what they had done, and stated explicitly that perpetrators should not be forgiven and should be severely punished. Some survivors described punishments such as life sentences, mutilation or execution for perpetrators.

Other survivors were more concerned that perpetrators receive treatment and rehabilitation, suggesting that perpetrating child sexual abuse should be viewed as an illness and treated clinically. They said more money should be invested in developing treatment programs and making them available to people outside of the criminal justice system – especially to children who have harmed other children. ‘Becky Sue’ told the Commissioner her experience of being sexually abused in foster care informed much of her work with young people in youth detention.<sup>889</sup> She said children and young people who had sexually abused other children often did not get the support they needed, and suggested greater access to ‘trauma-informed care and response’. ‘Becky Sue’ also said she had seen positive changes for children with harmful sexual behaviours through their participation in the arts. She said children with harmful sexual behaviours need:

people who can respond to trauma, and that’s what it is. People are being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder you know, like it’s quite common that that’s recognised and a lot of the responses are healing through the arts type stuff.<sup>890</sup>

Some survivors who had been imprisoned themselves called for longer sentences or more severe punishments for perpetrators of child sexual abuse. They often compared their own sentences for what they felt were less serious crimes to the way that perpetrators of child sexual abuse had been treated by the courts. ‘Amanda Jane’ attended her private session from prison, where she was serving time for fraud.<sup>891</sup> She told the Commissioner she was sexually abused by the pastor at her local Sunday school. ‘Amanda Jane’ said she told her mother, who reported the abuse to police, but ‘no one really believed us’ because her brothers had been getting into trouble and were known to police. ‘Amanda Jane’ said as a teenager ‘I just rebelled’, and over time came to commit crimes because it was the only way she could support herself and her children. Then one day, she said, her 11-year-old daughter was raped, and the perpetrator was given a suspended

sentence and allowed to walk free. ‘Amanda Jane’ said she feels very strongly that she should not be in jail for fraud while her daughter’s rapist walks free. The impact of such assaults is lifelong, she said, which should be reflected in the sentencing of perpetrators.

I just want something more severe to happen to them in the court system. The sentencing ... I don’t say I haven’t done bad, but when I compare fraud to rape that’s a lifetime sentence for me; it’s a lifetime sentence for my daughter – this is going to affect my daughter for the rest of her life.<sup>892</sup>

Royal Commission recommendations related to criminal justice are contained in our *Criminal justice* report.

## 9.5 Supporting victims and survivors

---

Survivors attending private sessions often made suggestions regarding support and advocacy services for victims and survivors. Some distinguished between support provided to children at the time of the sexual abuse, and support provided to survivors after the abuse, including support provided many decades later.

Royal Commission recommendations related to improved support for victims and, children and adult survivors of child sexual abuse are located in Volume 9, *Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services*, and our *Redress and civil litigation* report. Recommendations related to improved access and the quality of therapeutic interventions for children with harmful sexual behaviours are located in Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours*.

### 9.5.1 Support for children at the time of the abuse

Survivors often said that child victims of sexual abuse need someone they can trust and confide in. When they reflected on the time of the abuse, many survivors believed they would have benefited from a close relationship with a protective and caring adult. Some said that children find it difficult to talk to adults and discuss issues related to sex, and needed close mentoring and support so that signs of sexual abuse – such as changes in behaviour – can be more readily noticed. Others suggested an anonymous helpline that children could call to talk and ask questions about their experiences.

Many survivors wanted children to be believed if they disclosed sexual abuse to the adults around them, and for children to know they would be believed. These sentiments were especially strong for survivors who had lived in out-of-home care and youth detention institutions. Many said that they had been mistrusting of adults as children, and often had little opportunity to develop trusting relationships as they were moved many times between care placements or in and out of youth detention. ‘Sheldon’ told the Commissioner he was

placed in the care of the state when he was 12 weeks old, and was sexually abused in foster care and later in a youth detention facility.<sup>893</sup> He believed that children in care need an independent person they can go to when they are in trouble. He explained that children would need regular contact with that person to build trust:

The more someone comes in and talks to certain kids the more they are going to let out, the more they are going to start trusting them. Not just a one-time thing, 'are you all right' sort of thing.<sup>894</sup>

Other survivors said that children need opportunities to report sexual abuse that are independent from the people and organisations who are supervising their care. They said this would ensure that the victim has external support to address any problems within the institution, and would prevent conflicts of interest that may prevent institutional authorities from responding appropriately to the allegation of abuse. One survivor described how children should be encouraged to create resilience and disclosure networks among themselves.<sup>895</sup> In such a network, the victim would be able to tell a friend who can tell an adult, who would then help support them to disclose the sexual abuse and protect them from further abuse.

Survivors who had been sexually abused in out-of-home care often suggested that welfare workers needed to be better trained and informed about child sexual abuse and the particular needs of children in care. Some said they wanted more workers on call. Many survivors suggested that welfare agencies better support children making the transition to independence away from care and towards independence in the adult world.

### 9.5.2 Supports for survivors after the abuse

Many survivors described the value of being listened to and the importance of being able to speak about their experiences. Survivors who had kept silent for many years said that finally speaking about the abuse was helpful. Some survivors noted the role of the Royal Commission in providing them with an opportunity to speak up about their experiences and be taken seriously. 'Phillip David' said he decided to speak with the Royal Commission after a fellow prisoner advised him to sort his life out:

He said, 'look, you've got problems. I don't know what it is, but better off speaking to someone or you end up going to do something stupid, and you're going to do 20 or 30 years like me'. I said, 'yeah, you're right' ... He said to me, 'if you don't speak, don't get it out of you, it's going to affect you a lot more than what it is now'.<sup>896</sup>

Other survivors talked about the need for more specialised counselling services, both immediately after the sexual abuse and in the years and decades following. Many said that such counselling needed to be independent of the institution where the abuse occurred and that counsellors needed specific skills to address the needs of survivors of child sexual abuse.

‘Rodney Adam’ told the Commissioner he thought counsellors needed to understand that being a survivor was not the same as having a mental illness:

There seems to be a lot of services for mental illness but not for victims of abuse. It’s a different condition which doesn’t fit under mental health. Victims of abuse have sensitivity towards the behaviour of others and triggers. If sensitivities are avoided, victims of abuse are competent and able ... No one understands victims of abuse. It’s not a mental illness. Unfortunately this was the only help I had.<sup>897</sup>

Some survivors suggested a registry be established listing counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists who specialised in child sexual abuse and trauma-informed work.

Male survivors often said counsellors and counselling services needed to better understand the issues men faced. Some said they struggled to find counselling services that were not targeted towards women. Male survivors who had found high-quality counselling support, where their needs as men were understood, found these services were a ‘lifeline’ through difficult times. ‘Gavin’ told the Commissioner he was ‘crushed’ after a criminal trial where the perpetrators who sexually abused him were acquitted or only received a fine.<sup>898</sup> He said it was the local specialised sexual assault service that kept him alive, helping him to see that even though the outcome of the trial had not been ideal, he had achieved something worthwhile by increasing the profile of male survivors of child sexual abuse:

CASA [Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault] told me that just on the strength of the publicity ... they had more males enquiring with CASA than they’d had for the previous year. In that week they had guys coming out and actually citing my situation.<sup>899</sup>

Some survivors proposed an integrated service centre – a ‘one-stop shop’ – for all survivors of child sexual abuse. They suggested these service centres could provide counselling support, advocacy, case management and information for survivors and their families. Some also suggested they be able to receive referrals for qualified and skilled professionals. ‘Raph’ was clear about the need for services to support families and survivors:

We need people in an organisation who are going to take it and say, ‘This is a one-stop shop’. Right? This is a one-stop shop. You ring me up, I’m going to go out and bat for you. I’m going to talk to you, I’m going to give you all the procedures that you can take and if you get a door slammed in your face, then I’m going to open it for you.<sup>900</sup>

Other survivors suggested the service centre could provide and facilitate emotional and practical support, including opportunities for survivors to share experiences with each other and establish support networks. ‘Gerald’ proposed this idea, and told the Commissioner, ‘It sounds pie in the sky ... but I believe from what I’ve seen, it’s what’s needed’.<sup>901</sup>

### 9.5.3 Redress

Many survivors discussed the need for appropriate redress for what had happened to them. They said redress schemes needed to acknowledge the trauma of children who had been sexually abused in institutions, and noted the importance of recognising and remembering what had happened in a way that would help child sexual abuse survivors in the future. They wanted redress schemes to be efficient and straightforward, and for institutions and those responsible for the abuse to bear the cost. Many survivors suggested that the process for determining the amount of compensation be transparent. Some said survivors should be provided with an independent caseworker to help them manage their way through the complaints process. 'Raquel' said she applied for redress, though had not disclosed all her experiences on the application.<sup>902</sup> She said the process had not been properly explained, and she believed that the compensation was money to keep quiet. She told the Royal Commission that the money 'didn't mean nothing ... It was like, shut your mouth and say no more ... We were told to shut up, that's what I felt it was ... But we've still got to live with it'.<sup>903</sup>

Many survivors wanted institutions to apologise for the sexual abuse. Some felt that apologies were more valuable than monetary compensation. For example, 'Trent James' told the Commissioner he would 'prefer their apology to the money any day'.<sup>904</sup> Many survivors who wanted an apology said that apologies should be personalised, and that they should recognise the ripple effects of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts by also apologising to survivors' family members. 'Dee' said she would like to receive some kind of apology for the sexual abuse she experienced in her childhood, 'not for me, but for my grandchildren ... [for] what they done to me, and what they done to my family, and their families'.<sup>905</sup>

Other survivors suggested memorials and official days to remember survivors and victims of child sexual abuse. They said the memorials could become places of healing and support for survivors. Some felt that remembering was one way to prevent child sexual abuse and protect children in the present and the future. 'Ellis Owen' suggested historical residential institutions could become museums and places for remembering the past.<sup>906</sup> 'Cory' said he would like to see a memorial for all the children who had been sexually abused, in recognition of the suffering and injustice they experienced.<sup>907</sup> He wants people going past to know that everyone had a story. 'And not all the stories were the same. Each story is different'.<sup>908</sup>

# APPENDICES

# Appendix A knowmore brochure

## What is the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse?

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has been set up to investigate child sexual abuse that occurred in institutions such as government agencies, schools, orphanages, foster care, churches, mosques or missions, and how those institutions responded.

The Royal Commission is interested in hearing – in writing or over the phone – from people who were abused, or who witnessed abuse or the institution's response. The abuse can have occurred at any time.

**knowmore** is here to provide you with legal information, advice and counselling/social worker support to put you in the best position to decide if you want to tell your story or provide information to the Royal Commission, and, if you do, what is the best option for you to do so. We can also help you with writing a statement about your experience, or a submission about how procedures or laws could be improved.

## How to contact knowmore



**Free advice line 1800 605 762**  
**Our website [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au)**  
**Email [info@knowmore.org.au](mailto:info@knowmore.org.au)**

**Our Offices**

**Brisbane**  
 Suite 1, Level 16, 141 Queen St, Brisbane QLD 4000  
 PO Box 2151, Brisbane QLD 4001  
 T 07 3218 4500 F 07 3218 4590


**Sydney**  
 Suite G02, Ground Floor, 233 Castlereagh St, Sydney NSW 2000  
 PO Box 20319, World Square NSW 2002  
 T 02 8267 7400 F 02 8267 7490

**Melbourne**  
 Level 1, 180 Flinders St, Melbourne 3000  
 PO Box 84, Flinders Lane VIC 8009  
 T 03 8663 7400 F 03 8663 7490

 [knowmorecomms](https://www.facebook.com/knowmorecomms)  
 [@knowmorecomms](https://twitter.com/knowmorecomms)

**knowmore** acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia upon which we live and work. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.

**knowmore** has been established by, and operates as a separate program of, the National Association of Community Legal Centres, with funding from the Australian Government, represented by the Attorney-General's Department.



**Free legal help to navigate the Royal Commission**

**Were you or someone you know sexually abused as a child in an institution?**

A Royal Commission has been set up to investigate child sexual abuse in institutions such as government agencies, sporting clubs, churches, missions and foster care, and how those institutions responded.

If you think that this might be the right time and place for you to tell your story or provide information, **knowmore** provides free and confidential legal advice about your options for engaging with the Royal Commission, and about related issues such as confidentiality agreements and compensation.

## What is knowmore?

**knowmore is a free legal service that can advise you about engaging with the Royal Commission, and issues such as witness protection and confidentiality agreements. knowmore operates separately from the Royal Commission and government.**

Our staff are here to help you and act in your interest, they are experienced in providing culturally safe and trauma-sensitive advice.

**knowmore** has been established by the National Association of Community Legal Centres, with funding from the Australian Government represented by the Attorney-General's Department.

**Privacy and confidentiality**

**knowmore** is a confidential legal service. None of your personal information, or any information that identifies you, will be passed on to the Royal Commission, the government or any other party unless you ask us to or unless we are compelled or authorised by law to do so.

**Culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

We are committed to ensuring that our services are delivered in ways that are culturally safe and respectful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who can support you.

## What can knowmore do?

**Provide free legal advice and information and specialist counselling/social worker support to access our services.**

**knowmore** offers a free national advice line and where possible will see you in person as needed.

**knowmore** can help you with:

- legal information and advice about the Royal Commission's powers, procedures and guidelines and the range of options available to you for engaging with the Royal Commission
- advice on related legal issues such as the effect of confidentiality agreements in past proceedings and the availability of compensation
- linking you with specialist counselling and support services
- writing statements and submissions

**knowmore** does not provide legal representation for people appearing before the Royal Commission but, if needed, we can help you to find a suitable lawyer and to access funding.

**You can find out more by calling our free advice line: 1800 605 762**

## Who can knowmore help?

**Any member of the public who is considering giving information to the Royal Commission, or someone on their behalf.**

If you have experienced or witnessed child sexual abuse in an institution, or have information about an institution's response to such abuse, **knowmore** can provide you with free legal advice and support specific to your situation.

If for some reason, **knowmore** is unable to assist you, we will find you someone who can help.

If you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, you may like to speak with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement advisors.

### Helpful Numbers


**Lifeline** – 13 11 14  
 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention

**Suicide Call Back Service** – 1300 659 467  
 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention

**Adults Surviving Child Abuse** 1300 657 380 (9–5pm)  
 Counselling and support for survivors, supporters & workers

**Kids Helpline** – 1800 55 1800  
 24-hour support for young people

**Sexual Assault Counselling Australia** – 1800 211 028  
 Telephone counselling, information and support service for people affected by the Royal Commission and staffed with qualified trauma specialist counsellors. Monday-Friday 8am–11pm AEDT (Sydney Time)





# Appendix B knowmore brochure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

## Who can knowmore help?

**Any member of the public who is considering giving information to the Royal Commission, or someone on their behalf.**

### What services does knowmore provide?

**knowmore** provides free and confidential legal advice and information, with specialist counselling/social worker support if needed. If for some reason, **knowmore** can't help you, we will help you access another legal service or ongoing counselling support.

It's your choice whether to tell your story or provide information to the Royal Commission, we will help you by making sure you are in the best position to make an informed decision.

## How to contact knowmore

**Free advice line 1800 605 762**  
**Our website [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au)**  
**Email [info@knowmore.org.au](mailto:info@knowmore.org.au)**


### Our Offices

**Brisbane**  
 Suite 1, Level 16, 141 Queen St, Brisbane QLD 4000  
 PO Box 2151, Brisbane QLD 4001  
**T 07 3218 4500 F 07 3218 4590**

**Sydney**  
 Suite G02, Ground Floor, 233 Castlereagh St, Sydney NSW 2000  
 PO Box 20319, World Square NSW 2002  
**T 02 8267 7400 F 02 8267 7490**

**Melbourne**  
 Level 1, 180 Flinders St, Melbourne 3000  
 PO Box 84, Flinders Lane VIC 8009  
**T 03 8663 7400 F 03 8663 7490**

**Facebook:** [knowmorecomms](https://www.facebook.com/knowmorecomms)  
**Twitter:** [@knowmorecomms](https://twitter.com/knowmorecomms)



**Free legal help to navigate the Royal Commission**


**A Royal Commission has been set up to investigate child sexual abuse in institutions such as government agencies, churches, missions and foster care, and how those institutions responded.**

**knowmore** is a culturally safe legal service that operates separately from the Royal Commission and government.

If you think that this might be the right time and place for you to tell your story or provide information, **knowmore** provides free and confidential legal advice about your options for engaging with the Royal Commission, and about related issues such as confidentiality agreements and compensation.

We have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to listen to and support you.

**You can contact us by calling our free advice line: 1800 605 762**



ART: Jilany Lynch, Kooragang Arts Centre

**knowmore** acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia upon which we live and work. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.

**knowmore** has been established by, and operates as a separate program of, the National Association of Community Legal Centres, with funding from the Australian Government, represented by the Attorney-General's Department.

PHOTO: PHOTOFEST

## knowmore and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

**knowmore is a free legal service that provides confidential legal advice about your options for talking with the Royal Commission, and about related issues such as confidentiality agreements and compensation.**

The Royal Commission is interested in hearing from people who were sexually abused as children, or who witnessed child sexual abuse, in institutions. The abuse can have occurred at any time.

**knowmore** is here to help you understand your options in engaging with the Royal Commission and can provide practical assistance such as helping write statements or submissions if you choose to tell your story.

**knowmore** provides a culturally safe and respectful service to anyone who seeks our help.


**knowmore** has been established by the National Association of Community Legal Centres, with funding from the Australian Government represented by the Attorney-General's Department.

**knowmore** recognises that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in remote and regional areas, so if you need someone to come and speak in your community, let us know by calling 1800 605 762.


## Our staff

**knowmore employs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who have many years of experience supporting survivors of sexual abuse, violence and institutional abuse.**


**Glendra (Galiindurra) Stubbs**  
 Aunty Glendra is an Aboriginal woman of the Wiradjuri people with over 20 years experience providing advice and practical assistance to survivors of trauma, many of whom were also survivors of sexual abuse and violence.




**Dean Bell**  
 Dean is a descendant of the Ngunawal peoples from the Yass/ Canberra region and is a knowledge holder of the Ngunawal customs and traditions. Dean has over 20 years of specialised experience in delivering culturally safe and respectful services inclusive of deep listening.



**Megan Krakouer**  
 Megan is a Noongar woman from the south west corner of Western Australia with over 20 years of experience including the provision of cultural awareness training. Throughout her career, Megan has been a strong advocate for social justice.



**Robert Young**  
 Robert is a proud Kamilaroi/Ngunawal man born in Sydney. He holds strong connections to his culture and peoples with a passion for cultural safety. He has experience with educating and mentoring his people through cultural awareness, traditions, customs and has experience providing culturally safe services to the community.



## Helpful Numbers

**Lifeline** – 13 11 14  
 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention


**1800 RESPECT** – 1800 737 732  
 Information and support 24/7. National sexual assault, domestic family violence counselling service

**Suicide Call Back Service** – 1300 659 467  
 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention

**Adults Surviving Child Abuse** 1300 657 380  
 (9–5pm) Counselling and support for survivors, supporters & workers

**Kids Helpline** – 1800 55 1800  
 24-hour support for young people

**Sexual Assault Counselling Australia** – 1800 211 028  
 Telephone counselling, information and support service for people affected by the Royal Commission and staffed with qualified trauma specialist counsellors. Monday-Friday 8am–11pm AEDT (Sydney Time)



# Appendix C Registration confirmation thank you letter



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

[Date]

Dear [Name of attendee],

Thank you for registering for a private session with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. As you are probably aware, a private session is your chance to share your story with a Commissioner in a private and confidential setting.

Since May 2013, the Royal Commission has held private sessions with more than 6,500 people in capital cities and regional centres around Australia. Due to the large number of people coming forward, there may be a significant waiting time for your private session. For some, it may be as long as 9 months. However, we are doing all we can to minimise the length of waiting times.

When we have an appointment available, we will contact you using the details you provided to the Royal Commission. If your contact details change in the near future, please let us know by calling 1800 099 340 or emailing [contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au).

We understand that the length of this process may cause you concern. If you would like to speak to a Royal Commission counsellor, please call 1800 099 340, check our website or refer to the enclosed brochure for information about support services in the community who may be able to help you.

If you would like independent legal advice before your private session, you can contact knowmore who provide a free and confidential legal advice service. More information and contact details for knowmore can be found in the enclosed brochure.

Thank you for your interest in sharing your story with the Royal Commission. You can keep up to date with our work via our website, Facebook and Twitter.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Reed  
CEO

GPO Box 5283 Sydney NSW 2001 Australia T 1800 099 340 W [childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

# Appendix D Confirmation of private session letter



Royal Commission  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

[Date]

[Name of attendee]  
[Street address]  
[Suburb, state, postcode]

Dear [Name of attendee]

Thank you for your willingness to tell the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse about your experience. We are grateful for the valuable information you have already provided to us either in writing or over the phone.

The next step is a private session, which is a confidential and informal meeting where you tell your story to a Commissioner. Private sessions are an important way for Commissioners to bear witness to the impact of child sexual abuse and better understand how it might be prevented in the future. A private session has now been scheduled for you.

The details of your private session are:

**Time:** 10:20 am  
**Date:** Friday, 3 March 2017  
**Location:** The Office of the Royal Commission  
Governor Macquarie Tower  
1 Farrer Place  
Sydney NSW 2000

Please aim to arrive **15 minutes** before your private session. Upon arrival, proceed to the Royal Commission on Level 17. Enclosed is a map showing transport and parking options to help you get to your private session.

You will have about one hour to tell your story to a Commissioner. You might find it helpful to organise your thoughts before attending your private session. The enclosed **Sharing Your Story Booklet** will help you to do this. You are not required to read the booklet or complete the questions; they are included as a guide only to support you if you wish.

As we have many people waiting for a private session, and only a short time left to hold private sessions, opportunities to attend are limited. Please let us know with at least 48 hours' notice if you need to reschedule your private session. You can call the Private Sessions team on 0477 362 890.

The information you provide in your private session is confidential and not on public record. For most people, the information provided in a private session will not be used as evidence in hearings. The Royal Commission makes an audio recording during the private session, but it remains confidential unless you specify otherwise. Please note that for privacy reasons no other recordings of the private session can be made.





**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

The Royal Commission will publish a summary of some personal experiences that are shared with us in private sessions. They will be published in a way that no individual can be identified. Many of these experiences were published in our Interim Report, and we will also include them in our Final Report. When we do this, the identity of the person who told us their story, and of anyone else involved, will be kept completely confidential. Please tell the Commissioner in your private session if you do not want your story included in our report.

Should you have any questions about your private session appointment, please call the Royal Commission Private Sessions team on 0477 362 890. Should you wish to provide further information to the Royal Commission, either before or after your private session, please contact our Assessment and Inquiry Team on 1300 229 776.

Yours sincerely

Private Sessions Coordinator





## Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

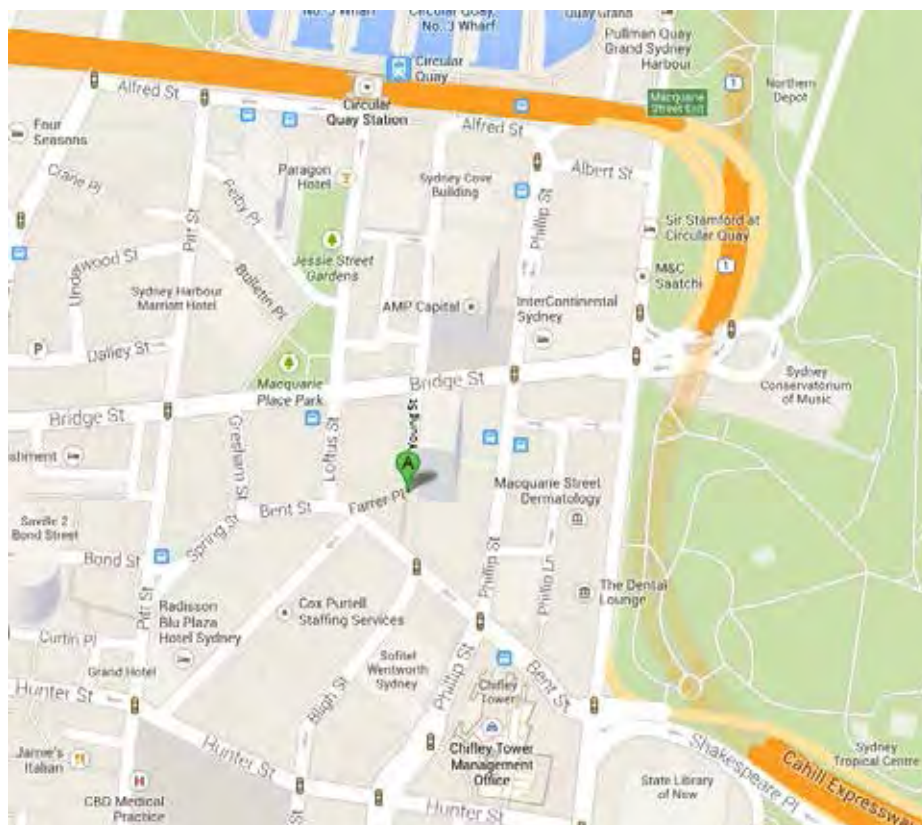
### VENUE, TRANSPORT AND PARKING ARRANGEMENTS

**VENUE:** ROYAL COMMISSION OFFICE

**ADDRESS:** Governor Macquarie Tower  
1 Farrer Place  
Sydney NSW 2000  
(shares a lobby with Governor Phillip Tower)

Governor Macquarie Tower is an accessible venue.

The telephone contact number for your private session appointment is 0477 362 890.



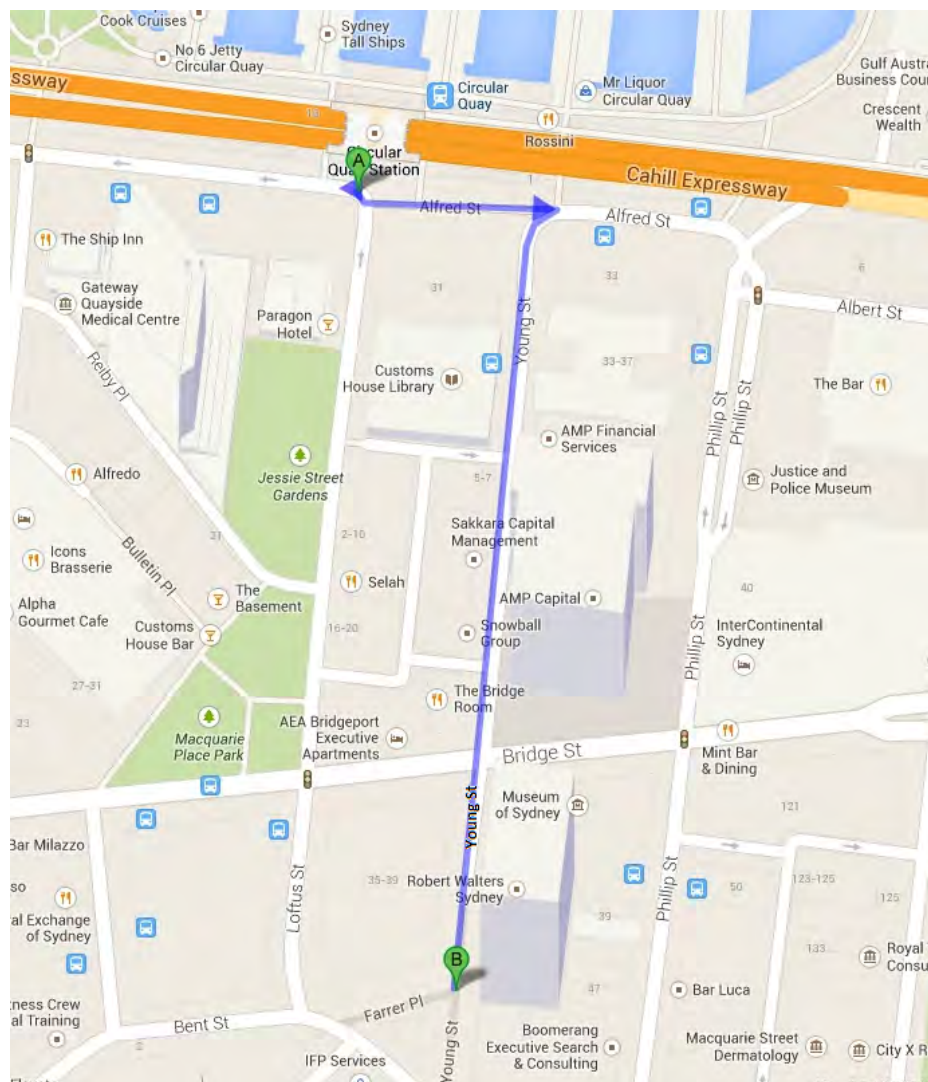




## Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

### TRANSPORT:

The closest train station is Circular Quay. The Office of the Royal Commission is a short walk up Young Street.





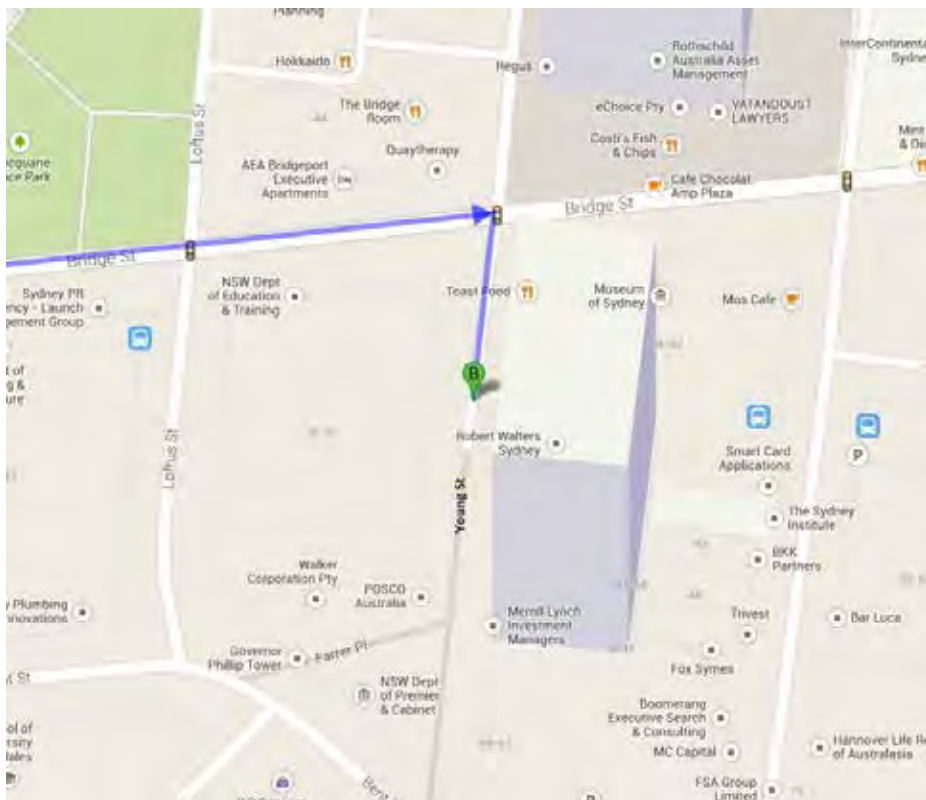
## Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

### **PARKING and DROP-OFF:**

Parking is available in the building. It is a Wilson Car Park with the entrance on Young Street which turns off Bridge Street.

A member of the Private Sessions Coordination team can assist with the cost of parking on the day of your appointment.

Young Street is also the best location to be dropped off either in a taxi or otherwise as there is room to stop and turn around.



## Appendix E Sharing your story: A guide to your private session



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

# Sharing your story

A guide to your private session

A SAFER FUTURE  
FOR CHILDREN



## Your story matters

Thank you for registering for a private session with the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission acknowledges that it is a big step and we value your courage in coming forward to share your story.

This booklet will help to answer some questions you may have before your private session, and provide a guide to the private session process.

## About private sessions

A private session allows you to share your story face-to-face with a Royal Commissioner in private and comfortable surroundings.

They are an important way for the Commissioners to hear first-hand the impact of child sexual abuse that has occurred in institutions.

To protect your privacy, details of private sessions are never made public.

Registrations for private sessions will close on 30 September 2016. Due to high demand nationwide, the current wait time for a private session is up to 12 months.



## Attending my private session

Now that you are registered for a private session, you will receive a phone call to determine the date and time of your session. A confirmation letter will also be sent to you to confirm the time, date, location and other relevant details, such as transport and parking. The Royal Commission can also help with the costs for you to attend your private session.

Private sessions are held in confidential locations, and nobody else is informed of the location.

A private session usually takes about one hour.

If you wish, you can be accompanied by an adult of

your choice as a support person. Your support person could be a friend or family member, or even a professional person that you feel comfortable with, such as a counsellor or doctor. They may wait in a room close by, or they can come into the session with you. If you choose to bring your support person into your session, their role will be to support you while you tell the Commissioner your story.

Before you come to your private session, it helps to prepare yourself and order your thoughts so you can make the most of your time with the Commissioner. Page 6 of this booklet provides a guide to the kinds of things you might like to consider.

## Private sessions for children and young people

The Royal Commission encourages children and young people (between the ages of 11 and 17 years) and their families to share their story with us in a private session.

Hearing from children and young people provides a valuable insight into contemporary practices within institutions.

Children and young people who have experienced child sexual abuse in an institution are able to tell their story in a safe and supportive environment.

We will ensure that a child or young person clearly understands the purpose of the private session and what their participation will involve, before they make the decision to participate.

We conduct a child safety and wellbeing assessment to ensure that children and young people are not at risk of harm and are safe and supported when sharing their story with us.

The assessment will determine:

- if the child or young person is capable of consenting to engagement with the Commission;
- their ability to participate in a private session;
- whether participating in a private session might impact on their safety and wellbeing;
- whether there are other ways of sharing their story that are better suited to the child.

A Royal Commission officer is assigned as the main point of contact for each child or young person who contacts the Royal Commission.

Two Royal Commission officers will be present for any face-to-face interaction with an unaccompanied child or young person under the age of 16.

All Royal Commission Officers who have contact, or are likely to have contact, with children are cleared to work with children.

## What happens at a private session?

A Royal Commission staff member will greet you when you arrive at the private session venue.

You will sit with the Commissioner and Commission staff, and there will be recording equipment on the desk. The session will be recorded, but it will be kept confidential unless you agree to it being made public.

You will be introduced to the Commissioner who will explain the process and invite you to begin sharing your story.

You may be asked some questions by the Commissioner. The questions asked and your answers will help the Royal Commission understand the circumstances of your experiences. If there are some aspects of your story you do not want to share, that's OK. You can simply say you do not wish to discuss it.

It's also OK if you can't remember some of the details you are asked about. You can just explain that you cannot remember.

The Commissioner can also accept documents from you during your private session, if you wish to provide them. Your documents will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed without your consent.

You won't be asked to take an oath, but you should tell the truth.

If you prefer, you can bring a written statement to hand to the Commissioner.

After your private session, a member of our support team will give you the opportunity to debrief, have some refreshments and talk to you about the support you may need. If you've brought a support person with you, they can stay with you while you debrief or they can wait in a room close by.

If you'd like to see more about what happens at a private session, there are some short videos on our website at <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/media-centre/videos>

## What will happen with the information I provide at my **private session**?



The information you provide is confidential. It will help the Royal Commission to understand the impact of institutional child sexual abuse and how it might be prevented in the future. The Royal Commission may also use the information to help it decide what further investigations it should undertake.

The Royal Commission may also use the information you provide in your private session

in our reports. If you agree to this during your private session, your information will be “de-identified”. This means that your identity (and any other information that could reveal your identity) will not be published in our reports.

If you wish, the Royal Commission can pass the information you give in your private session to the appropriate law enforcement

body. This will usually be done only with your agreement, unless the Chair of the Royal Commission believes that disclosing certain information will prevent a person from being harmed.

The Royal Commission can also pass on information to law enforcement agencies without consent if a person discloses an offence that has been, or is being, committed. This could include a disclosure of sexual offending against children.

### Help is on hand

We understand that sharing your story may be hard. It might be the first time that you have told anyone about the abuse and it may bring back painful memories.

If you need help sharing your story, or coping with the feelings that come with sharing your story, we can put you in touch with support services in your area that can help.

If someone has supported you in the past, you may want to reconnect with them so they can help you through this process.

Sharing your story is important and we will help you every step of the way.

The questions below are only a guide, and you do not have to answer all of them. It doesn't matter if you don't remember everything or don't know an answer to a question.

Thinking through these questions may help organise your thoughts before your private session.

## Questions that may help you share your story with the Royal Commission

### What happened

1. Are you telling us about child sexual abuse that happened to you?
  - ☐ Yes, it happened to me
  - ☐ No, it happened to someone else. What is your relationship to that person?
2. Where did the sexual abuse happen? If you can remember, tell us:
  - ☐ Institution
  - ☐ City/Town
  - ☐ State
3. When, or around when, did the abuse happen? If you can remember, provide us with a date, or a range of dates. Can you remember your age at the time?
4. Can you tell us what happened?
5. Did anyone else see what happened?
  - ☐ Yes. Who?
  - ☐ No/not sure
6. Did you tell anyone about it around the time when it happened?
  - ☐ Yes. Who?
  - ☐ No

## Reporting to the institution

1. Did you report the sexual abuse to the institution?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
2. Who at the institution did you tell about it? If you can remember, tell us their name and/or position.
3. What did you tell them?
4. When, or around when, did you tell them? If you can remember, provide us with the date or range of dates.
5. Did you put it in writing?  
☐ Yes. Do you have a copy of it?  
☐ No
6. Did you wait some time before telling the institution?  
☐ Yes. If yes, why?  
☐ No

## The institution's response

1. Did the institution do anything when you told it about the sexual abuse?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/not sure



2. How did the institution first respond?
3. What else did the institution do about it?
4. Did the institution investigate what happened to you?
  - ☐ Yes. If yes, how did they investigate?
  - ☐ No/Not sure
5. Did you feel encouraged by the institution for reporting the abuse?
  - ☐ Yes. Why?
  - ☐ No. Why not?
6. Did the institution offer you any help or support?
  - ☐ Yes. What help did they offer you?
  - ☐ No (Skip to question 9)
7. Did you accept the help or support they offered?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
8. To accept their help or support, did you have to agree to any conditions (like keeping it confidential)?
  - ☐ Yes. What were those conditions?
  - ☐ No

9. Did the institution accept responsibility for what happened?

- ☐ Yes. How? For example, did they apologise to you personally or in a public statement?
- ☐ No

10. Did the institution encourage you to report the abuse to the police?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

### Reporting to the police

1. Did you report the sexual abuse to the police?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No. Was there a reason why you didn't? Would you like us to report it for you?

2. If you reported the abuse to the police, who did you tell? Where and when? If you can remember, provide the police officer's name, police station and the date.

3. What did the police do?

4. Did the police charge the accused person?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No/Not sure

5. Did you give evidence in a criminal case?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. What was the result for the accused person?

### Compensation

1. Did you seek compensation for the sexual abuse?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. How did you seek compensation? For example, did you go to court, attend mediation, go through a formal compensation process, or approach the institution directly?

3. Did you receive a compensation payment?

☐ Yes. How much was the payment? Was it enough? Who paid it?

☐ No

4. Were there any conditions attached (like keeping it confidential)?

☐ Yes. What were they?

☐ No

5. Did you have help from a lawyer when you sought compensation?

☐ Yes

☐ No. Did the institution encourage you to seek independent legal advice before agreeing to any compensation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. How long did it take for you to receive compensation, from when you first requested it?

7. Were you satisfied with the compensation process?

☐ Yes. Why?

☐ No. Why not?

## Support

1. Have you received any emotional or psychological support since the sexual abuse?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. What support if any, have you had?

3. What support if any, are you getting now?

4. Is there any support you would like to have?

### Other inquiries

1. Have you told your story of child sexual abuse to another inquiry?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
2. If yes, which inquiry was it? What was its name?
3. How did you tell your story to that inquiry?  
☐ Made a written submission  
☐ Gave evidence in public  
☐ Gave evidence in private

### Your recommendations for change

1. Please let us know if you have suggestions that we should consider, or any other information you would like to share with us.
2. Do you have suggestions for changes to the institution's policies or procedures?
3. Is there anything you would like us to recommend to the government?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?

## Legal assistance

All information provided to the Royal Commission is protected by law.

Most people do not need legal assistance to talk to the Royal Commission. However, if you have legal questions or concerns about telling your story to the Royal Commission, you can contact knowmore, a free legal advisory service.

For more information visit [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au) or free call knowmore on 1800 605 762.



## Contact us

### General enquiries

8am - 8pm AEST/AEDT  
Monday to Friday (excluding national public holidays).

Callers within Australia  
– 1800 099 340  
Toll free number. Calls from a mobile or pay telephone will attract additional charges.

Callers from overseas  
– 61 2 8815 2319

### Postal address

GPO Box 5283  
Sydney NSW 2001

### Email and website

[contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

[www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

### Social media

 [www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm](https://www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm)

 [@CARoyalComm](https://twitter.com/CARoyalComm)



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

# Appendix F Practice Guideline 3: Guide questions for providing a statement or information to the Royal Commission



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

## **PRACTICE GUIDELINE 3**

### **GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR PROVIDING A STATEMENT OR INFORMATION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION**

1. This Practice Guideline is addressed to those who wish to provide information to the Royal Commission.
2. You may not know all the answers to these questions. If you don't know the answer, it would be helpful to put in your statement or tell us that you don't know.

### **GUIDE QUESTIONS**

#### **Details of the person providing the information**

3. Name (unless you wish to remain anonymous).
4. Contact details (unless you do not wish to give any contact details).
5. You may be giving information on behalf of or about someone else. If so, your relationship to the person whose experiences you are describing.

#### **Details about what happened**

6. The name of the institution(s) where you were abused.
7. Over what period of time did the abuse occur?
8. Where, including in which city or town and which State, did the abuse occur?
9. A summary of what happened.
10. The names of anyone else who saw what happened (if known).

#### **What happened afterwards**

11. Did you tell anyone, if so who and when?
12. If you told a person from the institution:



- a. what did you tell them?
  - b. who did you tell (name and position of that person, if known)?
  - c. when did you tell them?
  - d. whether you said it or put it in writing. If in writing, did you keep a copy and if so, do you still have a copy of it?
13. What was the initial response from the institution to having been told?
14. What did the institution do about it, if known?
15. If there was an investigation of the abuse by the institution, how was it conducted, if known?
16. What meetings or other dealings did you have with the institution during its investigation?
17. Did you feel encouraged or discouraged from reporting the abuse?
18. If you did not report for some time, were there reasons for not doing so? If so, what were those reasons?
19. After reporting, were you supported by the institution and if so, how?
20. Did you receive counselling or psychological help? If so, who provided it?
21. Did you receive an apology or an acknowledgment of the abuse you had suffered?
22. Did the institution accept responsibility for what happened?
23. Were there any conditions attached to accepting any help from the institution?
24. How adequate was the support that was offered to you?
25. Were you encouraged or supported to report your abuse to the police?
26. Did you do this and if so, to whom, where, when and what happened?

27. If you did not report to the police, were there reasons for not doing so? If so, what were those reasons?
28. Were there criminal proceedings, and if so did you give evidence, and what was the outcome of those proceedings?
29. What were the consequences for the accused person(s), if known?

#### **Compensation**

30. Have you sought compensation and if so, was that through the civil court or some other means?
31. Were there any conditions attached to accepting that compensation, for example that it had to be kept confidential?
32. Was an amount received, and if so, who paid it and how much was it?
33. What is your view of the adequacy of any compensation, either offered or received?
34. How long did it take to receive compensation?
35. Were you satisfied with the process in dealing with the complaint and/or the compensation? If yes or no, please explain.

#### **Suggestions**

36. What do you think should have been done differently?
37. What do you think would have made a difference to you at the time?
38. What helped you subsequently?
39. What would help you in the future?

#### **Support**

40. What emotional/psychological support have you sought since the abuse?
41. What support are you currently receiving?

42. What further support would be of value to you?

**Other matters**

43. Have you given the account to another inquiry. If so, which inquiry, whether by written submission or evidence and was that in public or in private?
44. Do you wish that account to be obtained and used as your account to the Royal Commission.
45. Do you want your account to the Royal Commission to be kept private or made public.

**Reporting to police**

46. Do you want the Royal Commission to forward your complaint to the police?

**What do you hope will happen upon telling the Royal Commission of your experience**

47. Do you want to be listened to?
48. Do you want the Police to investigate your complaint?
49. Do you want the Royal Commission to understand what happened and to make recommendations to improve the system?
50. Is there any other reason? If so, what is it?

Draft Issued: 28 March 2013

# Appendix G Authorisation to be at private session

Authorisation No: APS

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

*Royal Commissions Act 1902*

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO  
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

## **AUTHORISATION TO BE PRESENT AT A PRIVATE SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF SECTION 6OG**

In pursuance of section 6OG, *Royal Commissions Act 1902*, I, Mr Robert Atkinson AO APM, Commissioner of the Commission established under Letters Patent dated 11 January 2013 to make inquiry into and report upon the above-mentioned matters, authorise the persons identified in the Schedule to be present during the private session to be held by me on [Insert day, date and year] 2017 to obtain information in relation to matters into which the Commission is inquiring.

## **SCHEDULE**

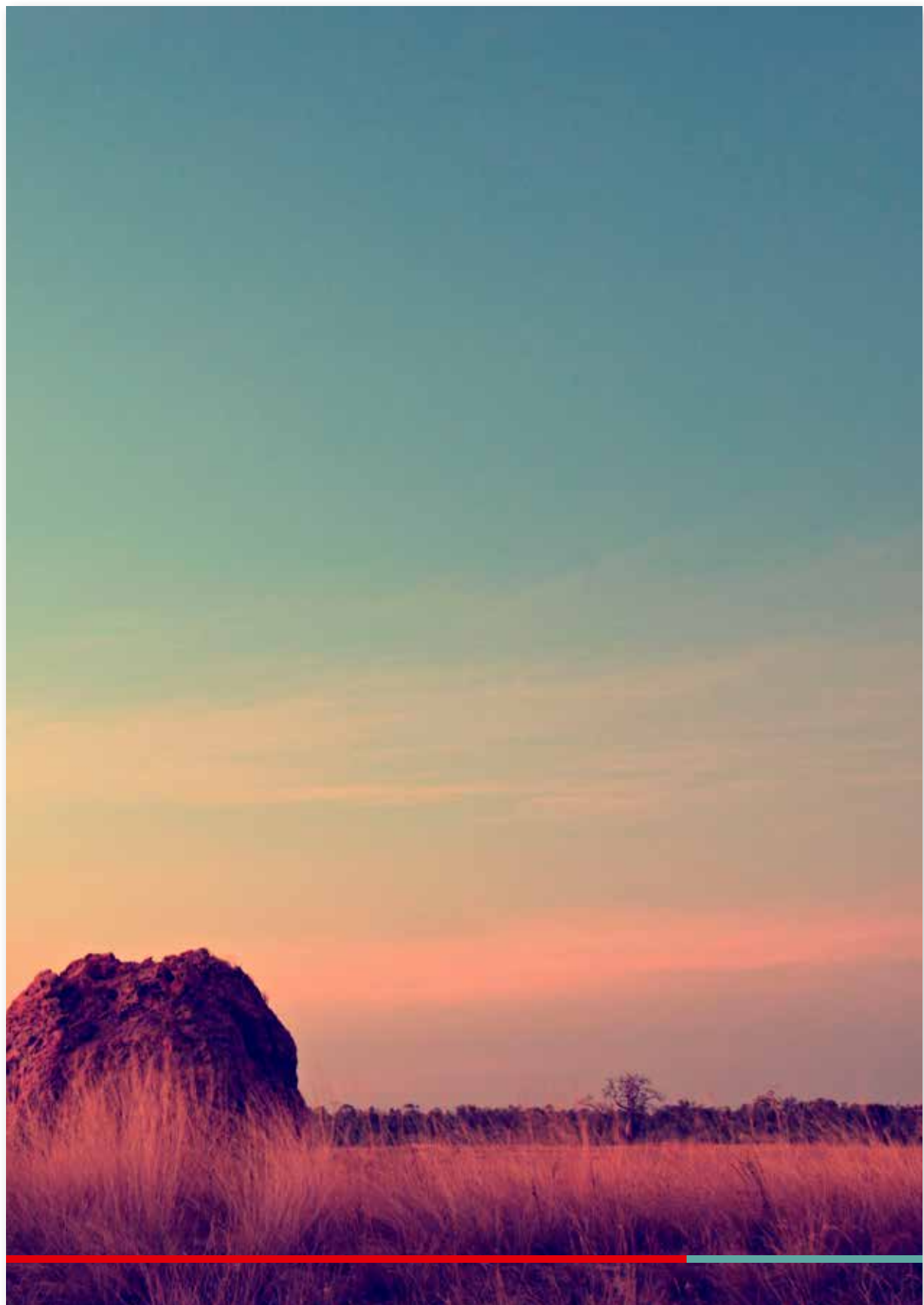
Dated this      day of                      2017


.....  
Mr Robert Atkinson AO APM  
Commissioner

Section 6OG, *Royal Commissions Act 1902* empowers a member of the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission holding a private session to authorise persons to be present during the private session.

## Appendix H After sharing your story







Thank you for sharing your story with the Royal Commission. We recognise that sharing your story can be difficult and we thank you for your courage in coming forward.

Sharing your story in a private session or written account is an important way for the Commissioners to bear witness to the stories of survivors of child sexual abuse while under the responsibility of an institution. Your story will contribute to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission to improve laws, policies and practices and create a safer future for children.

*Thank you*

# Message to Australia

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is making a book called 'Message to Australia'.

The book will be made up of messages from people who have attended a Royal Commission private session or provided a written account of their experiences.

At the end of the Royal Commission, the book will be kept at the National Library of Australia, where it will be available to members of the public and preserved for future generations.

Do you have a message that you would like us to include in the book?

Your message can tell other Australians about your experience, and any hopes you have for making the future safer for all children.

If you would like to send us a message, all you need to do is fill out the enclosed piece of paper. A stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed for you to send your message to us.

While not all of the messages will be included in the final 'Message to Australia' book – every message is important and we encourage you to share yours.

Please remember:

- Don't include your name or any other person's name, addresses or other personal information.
- Don't include swear words.
- Only fill out one side of the piece of paper.

We know that sharing your story wasn't easy but we are very grateful that you did so.

Thank you sharing your story and for giving us your Message to Australia.



If you would like to send us your Message to Australia, please write your message in the space provided below and send it back using the enclosed reply paid envelope. If you need assistance writing your Message to Australia please contact us, our details are provided in the back of this booklet.

## My Message to Australia

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## After sharing your story



Many people who have shared their story describe feeling that they have been heard, believed and respected. They often describe feeling lighter, relieved or less burdened.

Later, you may also feel a mix of fluctuating feelings such as flat, angry, depressed or proud of yourself for sharing your story. You can expect this after such a significant personal step.

You may already have strategies you use to process the different emotions that arise.

Here are a few suggestions you may find helpful from survivors who have come forward to share their stories:

- Know that these feelings are to be expected.
- Talk to someone you trust, even if you don't feel like it.
- Be kind to yourself – do things that are self-nurturing.
- Honour your survival and challenge the negative self-talk.
- Safely express feelings by doing things like crying, exercise, talking and writing.
- If you feel overwhelmed, call crisis and support services.

### What will happen to the information I have provided to the Royal Commission?

The information you have provided to the Royal Commission will help us to better understand the impact of child sexual abuse in institutions and how it might be prevented in the future.

The Royal Commission is bound by legislation to keep the information you provide confidential. The Royal Commission may also use the information to help decide what further investigations it should undertake.

If you have agreed to it, the Royal Commission may also use some of your information in its reports. Your information will be 'de-identified', which means that your identity (and any other information that could reveal your identity) will not be published in our reports.

If you wish, the Royal Commission can pass the

information you give in your private session to the appropriate law enforcement body. This will usually be done only with your agreement, unless the Chair of the Royal Commission believes that disclosing certain information will prevent a person from being harmed.

### Will my information be used in a public hearing?

Decisions about whether your information might be useful for a public hearing, or whether the institution you talked about should be investigated further by the Royal Commission, are not usually made until after the private session is finished.

If it is later decided that your information might be useful for an investigation or public hearing, you will be contacted by a Commission officer to discuss whether or not you are willing to give evidence at a hearing. You will only need to give evidence at a hearing if you agree to it.

## What happens next?



If you have shared your story in a private session, you will be contacted by a member of the Royal Commission support team to follow up with you within a few weeks.

They can discuss with you any of the reactions you have had to sharing your story, and if needed, put you in touch with a range of services to best meet your circumstances. These may include counselling and legal services.

If you have shared your story in a written account, you

can expect a letter from the Commissioner who has read your written statement.

Because we are finding out about so many institutions, it is impossible for us to investigate every institution in a public hearing. We are selecting public hearings very carefully, and this means for most people, your private session, or written statement, will be the end of your involvement with the Royal Commission.

Thank you again for speaking with us.

## Crisis and support contact details

**1800 Respect:**

1800 737 732 or visit [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

**Lifeline:**

13 11 14

**Mensline:**

1300 789 978

**A list of support services is available at:**

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>

# Contact Us

## General enquiries

8am - 8pm AEST/AEDT  
Monday to Friday (excluding  
national public holidays).

Callers within Australia  
– 1800 099 340  
Toll free number. Calls from  
a mobile or pay telephone  
will attract additional charges.

Callers from overseas  
– 61 2 8815 2319

## Postal address

GPO Box 5283  
Sydney NSW 2001


## Email and website

[contact@childabuseroyal.com.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyal.com.au)

[www.childabuseroyal.com.au](http://www.childabuseroyal.com.au)

## Social media

 [www.facebook.com/  
CARoyalComm](https://www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm)

 [@CARoyalComm](https://twitter.com/CARoyalComm)





**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

# Appendix I Procedures for engagement and support of children and young people in private sessions

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse aims to give all Australians affected by child sexual abuse in an institutional context an opportunity to share their story with us. While many people who approach us are adult survivors, we encourage children and young people (under the age of 18 years) and their families to also share their stories. Hearing from children and young people provides a valuable insight into contemporary practices within institutions.

These *Procedures* assist Royal Commission staff to engage with children and young people who want to participate in private sessions.

It is critical that children and young people who come forward as survivors or witnesses of child sexual abuse in an institutional context are able to tell their story in a safe and supportive environment.

For this reason, each child or young person's cognitive, linguistic and emotional capacity to participate in a private session is carefully assessed, to ensure that their wellbeing is not jeopardised by the experience.

We do not have a lower age limit for when a child or young person can participate in a private session. We are guided by whether participation in a private session would be in the best interests of the child, by having an appropriately qualified person undertake a careful assessment. Where a child is 10 years or under, there is an expectation that a parent or other appropriate adult will represent the child during the private session. In these cases and cases where it is unlikely to be of benefit to the child to attend a private session, the child may contribute to the telling of their story by other means, if this is considered appropriate.

We ensure that a child or young person clearly understands the purpose of the private session and what their participation will involve, before they make the decision to participate.

We have carefully considered whether the involvement of a child or young person in a private session could pose risks for evidence required to be given in concurrent or subsequent criminal or civil proceedings. Whilst careful consideration of this issue forms part of any decision about whether or not they should participate in a private session, in general we consider that the private session process is separate to and different from civil and criminal proceedings.



## Procedures

### 1. Safety and Wellbeing

All Royal Commission Officers who engage with a child or young person in the course of their work are responsible for ensuring the child's safety and wellbeing.

All Royal Commission Officers who have contact, or are likely to have contact, with children must have a current Working with Children Check (WWCC) from the jurisdiction in which they reside.

Private sessions involving a child or young person who is a victim or witness of child sexual abuse are prioritised and expedited to minimise waiting time. A Counsellor from the Royal Commission's Counselling and Support Team is assigned as the main point of contact for each child or young person who contacts the Royal Commission seeking a private session.

The Counsellor conducts a child safety and wellbeing assessment during the initial contact and at all other appropriate stages of the private session process. A child or young person's participation in the private sessions' process can only proceed if the safety and wellbeing assessment is favourable.

During the assessment of a child or young person's ability to participate in a private session, the Counsellor considers if there are any current risk of harm concerns and if there are sufficient protective factors within the child or young person's family and/or community to keep the child or young person safe and supported. Where support appears to be lacking, the Counsellor may make a referral to an appropriate external agency, which can help the child or young person prepare for the private session and support them with any other issues they may have.

Children and young people are encouraged to attend private sessions with the support of a parent or other appropriate adult. However, a child or young person's decision to attend without adult support will be respected if the Counsellor assesses that the child or young person has the emotional ability and sufficient external support to participate unaccompanied.

Two Royal Commission Officers are in attendance for any face-to-face interaction with an unaccompanied child or young person under the age of 16 years. Commission Officers advise children or young people, their parents or guardians of this policy prior to the child or young person's contact with Commission staff.

If a child or young person makes their first disclosure of sexual abuse to a Royal Commission Officer, or if the Officer has concerns for the safety and wellbeing of child, the Officer utilises the appropriate reporting procedures set out in section 9 *Communication of Information with Law Enforcement and Child Protection Agencies*.

## 2. Assessing the child or young person's ability to participate

The Counsellor assigned to the child or young person conducts a comprehensive assessment of the child or young person to determine:

- if the child or young person is capable of consenting to engagement with the Commission;
- their ability to participate in a private session; and

whether participation in a private session might threaten the child or young person's safety and wellbeing.

A child or young person may participate in a private session if the Counsellor's assessment is favourable. If not, the Counsellor will recommend other ways that the child or young person might be able to engage with the Royal Commission.

This assessment considers the child or young person's age and school stage, along with their development levels and abilities (cognitive, linguistic and emotional). It includes consultation with the child or young person; their family, where appropriate; and any external support agencies involved with the child or young person.

We encourage all children and young people engaging with the Royal Commission to access support from an external agency if they are not already doing so. If the child or young person and/or their family are not already receiving support from an external agency, the Counsellor may provide a referral to an appropriate agency and will explain to the child or young person and/or their family the benefits of seeking such support. An external experienced support person may then assist the child or young person in preparing the telling of their story at the private session, attend to any current risk or wellbeing issues and provide ongoing support, after the private session process, if required.

The Counsellor will monitor the child or young person's wellbeing and ability to continue their engagement with the Royal Commission at all stages of the private session process.

## 3. Consent to participate in a private session

A child or young person must be able to give informed consent to participate in a private session. In determining a child or young person's capacity to give informed consent, the Counsellor assesses whether the child or young person has sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to fully understand what is proposed.

If the child or young person is capable of giving informed consent, the Counsellor discusses with the child or young person all the relevant information about participating in a private session, including any possible consequences (including limits to confidentiality, such as when risk of harm may be communicated to law enforcement agencies), and whether or not the child or young person consents to participate.

In general, in order for children aged 10 to 12 years to participate directly in a private session, we consider it advisable to also obtain the consent of a parent or guardian. Where a parent or guardian of these younger children does not consent to the child's participation, the private session would generally proceed on the basis of the parent or other appropriate adult representing the child during the private session. For older children and young people, the Counsellor will consider, during their assessment, whether the consent of the child or young person is sufficient for the private session to proceed or whether the consent of a parent or guardian should also be obtained.

#### 4. The level of engagement

If the Counsellor's assessment is that a child or young person should not participate in a private session, this will be communicated to the child or young person and/or their family by the Counsellor along with any recommendations about other ways that the child or young person can engage with the Royal Commission and/or that their story can be heard. If the child or young person and/or their family does not agree with that assessment, the assessment report is provided to the Chair of the Royal Commission. The Chair will make the final determination on whether the child or young person can or cannot participate in a private session. This determination will be based on the best interests of the child.

A child or young person may represent themselves in a private session, be represented by a parent, other appropriate adult or support person, or make a joint presentation with a parent or other appropriate adult in the same session or separate sessions. The Royal Commission's support for the child or young person's request will depend on the Counsellor's assessment.

Where a child is 10 years or under, it is expected that the child will be represented by a parent or other appropriate adult. Depending on the Counsellor's assessment, the child may participate at some level in the private session process (eg by preparing their story in advance in writing or by submitting an illustration or recording to the Commission).

For children and young people aged 11 and above, the level and type of engagement will be subject to the Counsellor's assessment of their safety and wellbeing, their capacity and their willingness to participate directly or be represented by their family in a private session. For those older children and young people who are assessed as able to represent themselves in their private session, the Counsellor may work with the child or young person to enable them to tell their story in a form of their choosing and with the appropriate supports.

## 5. Preparing for a private session

We provide resources to assist the child or young person to tell their story during a private session, such as art materials and other resources that may assist in creating a child friendly environment. During the assessment, the Counsellor considers and makes recommendations regarding any resources or tools chosen by the child or young person that may assist them to tell their story, ensuring that the Commissioner and Commission Officer assisting the private session are aware of and able to assist the child or young person's to use these resources.

It is important that the setting of the private session is child friendly and that the child or young person feels safe and comfortable during the private session. During the assessment process, the Counsellor will consider whether any special consideration needs to be given to the setting of the private session and can discuss the issue with the child or young person and/or their family, where appropriate. Where it is not possible to meet these needs, the Counsellor may recommend that the child or young person engage with the Royal Commission in another way, rather than in a private session.

The Counsellor may also familiarise the child or young person with the private session venue prior to the private session, to assist the child or young person to feel more comfortable.

The Counsellor ensures that the child or young person and their family/support person understands the private session process and the roles and responsibilities of all Commission Staff involved. The Royal Commission Officer assisting the private session also meets the child or young person and their family immediately prior to the commencement of the private session and confirms that the child or young person and their family/support understand the process and roles, and consents to participate.

## 6. Children with particular vulnerabilities

The particular needs of children or young people with a disability, who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, who are from culturally diverse backgrounds, or who may identify as gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, are accommodated wherever possible. This may include a range of adaptations to the usual private sessions' process, such as using interpreters, having culturally appropriate staff and resources available, using alternative communication methods such as communication boards or touch-to-talk tablets, adjusting use of language or having wheelchair accessible venues.

The assessments undertaken by the Counsellor include comprehensive consideration of the child or young person's cultural and linguistic background where this is relevant to the child or young person's participation in the private session. In the case of children with disability, Counsellors will particularly consider and make recommendations regarding on the best way to communicate with the child.

The Counsellor may also make recommendations about the most appropriate venue and location for the child or young person's engagement with the Royal Commission. Some children may feel safer in a less formal and/or more familiar environments than those used for private sessions. Where it is not possible to meet these needs during the private session, the Counsellor may recommend that the child or young person engage with the Royal Commission in another way, rather than in a private session.

## 7. Follow up and review

The Counsellor assigned to the child contacts the child or young person and/or their family within one week after the private session to check on child or young person's wellbeing. During this call, the Counsellor may offer to refer the child or young person and/or their family to external support services, if appropriate.

During this call, the Counsellor will also provide feedback to the child or young person about their private session, which feedback may have been obtained from the Commissioner or the Commission Officer assisting the private session and may include how the information provided by the child or young person is being used by the Royal Commission. The child or young person and/or their family will also be given the opportunity to provide any feedback to the Royal Commission on the private sessions' process and to make any recommendations for improvement to private sessions for children and young people. This feedback is then passed to relevant Teams within the Royal Commission for their consideration.

The Royal Commission provides regular review opportunities for Staff working with children and young people and their families in the private session process. This allows Staff to reflect on their experience and learning and propose/consider any changes to current practice.

## 8. Communicating with children and young people

It is important to minimise the number of people that a child or young person has to tell their story to or speak to during the private session process. Where possible, the same Royal Commission contact person, usually the assigned Counsellor, is responsible for liaising with the child or young person throughout the duration of their involvement with the Royal Commission. Where the initial contact by a child or young person is with a Royal Commission Officer other than a Counsellor, the child or young person is referred to a Counsellor as soon as possible.

When communicating with a child, Royal Commission Officers use plain English language that is appropriate to the age and comprehension of the child.

When working with children, Royal Commission staff demonstrate behaviours that:

- show a child is being heard
- show faith in a child's ability to competently communicate
- are accepting of any response, even 'I don't know'
- pay attention to non-verbal cues, such as agitation, distress, signs of anxiety, and respond appropriately.

When conducting a private session with children and young people, Commissioners and other Royal Commission staff who interview children will do so in a way that: establishes rapport with the child or young person, ensures that the child or young person understands why they are in the private session, uses language that the child or young person can understand and encourages the child or young person to tell their story in their own words.

## 9. Communication of Information with Law Enforcement and Child Protection Agencies

Section 6P of the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) (The Act) allows the Royal Commission to report any concerns regarding risk of harm to a child or young person to appropriate law enforcement and child protection authorities.

Communication of information obtained outside of the private session

When a child or young person contacts the Royal Commission to provide information, the relevant Royal Commission Officer explains to the child or young person any limits to confidentiality, including the circumstances in which the Commission may communicate information to law enforcement agencies or child protection authorities.

If a child or young person contacts the Royal Commission and provides information that she or he, or any other child or young person, is in immediate danger, the Royal Commission Officer encourages or assists the child or young person to contact emergency services, in addition to the processes set out below.

A Royal Commission Officer who is a mandatory reporter by reason of their usual professional training or employment, for example police or psychologists, continues to fulfil their personal reporting obligations directly to the relevant child protection authority, except where that information was obtained during a private session.

In addition to fulfilling any mandatory reporting obligations, a Royal Commission Officer who makes a mandatory report also provides the information immediately to the Royal Commission's Senior Police Officer or the Royal Commission Solicitor. The Senior Police Officer and/or Solicitor determines whether a referral under the Act should also be made.

### **Communication of information obtained during private session**

Where information is obtained during a private session, information can be forwarded to police or child protection authorities if:

- the informant has requested or consented to the information being communicated; or
- in the absence of consent, the Chair (or Commissioner, in his absence) believes it necessary to communicate the information to prevent harm to a child.

A Royal Commission Officer who, during a private session, receives information that a child or young person may be at risk of harm must provide the information as soon as practicable to both the Team Leader of the Private Sessions Legal Team, and either the Royal Commission Senior Police Officer or Royal Commission Solicitor. The Royal Commission Officer then notes in the written summary of the private session a recommendation that the Senior Police and/or Commission Solicitor should consider communicating the information pursuant to s6P of the Act.

The Senior Police Officer and/or Solicitor will determine whether a referral under the Act is required. The Senior Police Officer or Solicitor:

- **completes the *Report to Chair of Commission – recommendation to Communicate Information to Law Enforcement Agency or Child Protection Authority* seeking a decision by the Chair, or in his absence by a Commissioner, to communicate the information to a law enforcement or child protection agency**
- **upon receipt of approval, completes the required form, either an *Urgent Law Enforcement/Child Protection Authority Communication Form* or the *Standard Law Enforcement/Child Protection Authority Communication Form***
- communicates the information to the relevant law enforcement or child protection agency through their designated liaison officer.

Where the private session attendee consents to the communication of information to police or child protection authorities, information that is communicated may include a summary of relevant information provided in the private session. Where consent has not been given, police or the child protection authority is provided with the name and contact details of the attendee together with a statement that a child may be at risk of harm and the named person may hold information regarding the risk of harm.

## 10. Complaints Handling

During the follow up call by the Counsellor after the private session, the child or young person and/or their family will be given the opportunity to provide any feedback to the Royal Commission on the private sessions' process and to make any recommendations for improvement to private sessions for children and young people. This feedback is then passed to relevant Teams within the Royal Commission for their consideration.

Where the feedback is, in effect, a complaint about the private sessions' process or about any other aspect of the Royal Commission's work, the Royal Commission's Complaints Handling Procedure is followed.



# Appendix J Checklist: Private sessions with children

Conducting a private session with children:

Checklist for Commissioners and Commission officers

## **1 Introduction/ Rapport building**

- Introduce those present, including Commissioner and Commission officer
- Checking child's understanding of the purpose of the private session
- Explaining the ground rules and purpose of the private session
- Reassurance - check child/young person's understanding
- permission to proceed.

## **2 Free-narrative accounts**

- Use of non-leading and open-ended questions that support free narrative
- Use simple language
- Use prompts to encourage child to elaborate response
- Allow flexibility for child to talk about what they remember
- Use resource tools (developed for working with younger children, children with disability).

## **3 Questioning**

- Use simple and concrete questions
- Avoid forced choice, multiple choice or leading questions
- Ask positive rather than negative questions
- Use active rather than passive voice
- Use child's words and vocabulary, where possible
- Discuss events in logical sequence, but allowing flexibility for child to talk about what they want to talk about.

## **4 Closing the interview**

- Ensure child is not distressed
- Give positive feedback on their participation
- Check if there is anything else they wish to say
- Give thank you
- Outline the process from here – what happens when they leave the private session.

# Appendix K Share your story: Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

## CONTACT US

### GENERAL ENQUIRIES

8am - 8pm AEST/AEDT Monday to Friday (excluding national public holidays).  
Callers within Australia – 1800 099 340  
Toll free number. Calls from a mobile or pay telephone will attract additional charges.  
Callers from overseas – 61 2 8815 2319

### POSTAL ADDRESS

GPO Box 5283, Sydney NSW 2001

### EMAIL AND WEBSITE

[contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)  
[www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

### SOCIAL MEDIA

 [www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm](https://www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm)  
 @CARoyalComm

## MORE INFORMATION

READ ABOUT OUR WORK AND WATCH OUR PUBLIC HEARINGS LIVE AT:  
[www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)



Royal Commission  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse





Artwork by Jenni McEwen, a descendant of the Bundjalung people from Baryulgil in Northern New South Wales. The circles represent elders, parents, children and family coming together.



Royal Commission  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

# SHARE YOUR STORY

with the Royal Commission

## INFORMATION FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

A SAFER  
FUTURE FOR  
OUR CHILDREN

# YOUR STORY MATTERS

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has been set up to look into how institutions have managed and responded to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse.

If you were sexually abused as a child while in the care of an institution in Australia, you can share your story with the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission is hearing from people all around Australia.

Your story is very important. Sharing your experiences will help show Australia what happened to children in the past, and help build child safe organisations in the future.

## WE WILL LISTEN

Many people have already come forward.

Once you feel you are ready, please register your interest in sharing your story:

**Ring up:** 1800 099 340  
**Email us:** [contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)  
**Write:** GPO Box 5283, Sydney NSW 2001

Once you have registered your interest we will contact you to work out exactly how, where and when you will share your story with us.

Some people are choosing to speak face-to-face with one of our six Commissioners in a private session, some have written their story down and others have shared their experience with us over the phone.

If you need a translator let us know.

## WE ARE HERE TO LISTEN

## SUPPORT IS ON HAND

We understand that sharing your experience can be hard.

This may be the first time you have told anyone about the abuse, or it may bring back painful memories.

If you need help to share your story or to cope with the feelings you are experiencing there are support services in your area which can help.

For a full list of support services visit [www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au) or call 1800 099 340.

Most people do not need legal assistance to talk to the Royal Commission. However, if you have legal questions or concerns about sharing your story with the Royal Commission, you can contact knowmore, a free legal advisory service for people who would like legal advice before or after contacting the Royal Commission.

For more information about knowmore visit: [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au) or freecall on 1800 605 762.

# Appendix L The narrative writing process

## The task

The narrative writer's task is to transform an audio recording of a private session into a short story that is:

- Faithful to the attendee's account
- De-identified
- Engaging and accessible.

Stories need to be short, so can't include everything. The writer's first and most important step when deciding what material to include in a story is to ask 'what is important to the attendee?' Additionally, there are many secondary considerations that a writer will take into account when writing a story, such as:

## Useful things to include in the story

**Background:** where and when was the attendee born? Where did they grow up? Family structure? School? Church? Sporting or recreational clubs?

**Incidents:** where and when did the abuse take place? What was the attendee's relationship to the abuser? Who is the abuser (age, gender, role etc)? How many incidents over what duration? Were other children also abused? How did it end?

**Disclosure then:** did the attendee disclose the abuse to anyone at the time? If not, why not? If so, what was that person's reaction? How did the institution respond? How did the attendee feel about the institutional response?

**Impact:** how did the abuse affect the attendee at the time? How did its legacy affect their life? How have they managed to cope?

**Disclosure later:** did the attendee disclose the abuse to someone later in life? Who? When? Why? What difference did this make to their life?

**Redress:** has the attendee reported the matter to police? To the institution? Have they taken any legal action? If not, why not? If so, how did the attendee feel about the process and its outcome?

**Now/Future:** what is the attendee's life like now? Any examples of resilience? Any victories, achievements, good relationships or other positive things? Does the attendee have any recommendations? Why did they come to the Royal Commission? What are their hopes for the future?

## Some guiding principles

**Keep it clear and concise:** you can write any way you like, so long as it's clear. But in general, favour short sentences and short paragraphs. Bear in mind what the story will look like on the computer screen and printed page. Large blocks of text are off-putting for most readers.

**Get to the point:** try to cover the abuse early in the story or otherwise hook the reader.

**Address the Terms of Reference (TOR):** roughly speaking, we only cover stories that fall within these TOR: *sexual* abuse of a *child* in an *institution* (or by a member of an institution). Sometimes attendees want to talk about other things. It's okay to include non-TOR things in your story but always include some mention of the issue that falls within TOR.

**Use quotes:** and when you do, be accurate always. A paraphrase is not a quote and MUST NOT appear in quotation marks. See style notes below for more detailed guidance.

**Include a few unique details:** they add colour to the story and help readers relate to the attendee's experience. But don't go overboard. Too much detail will render a story inaccessible.

**Tell a story, not a parable:** focus on the survivor's story and avoid overly moral, or judgemental words or sentences.

**Avoid overly emotive language:** these stories are powerful enough on their own; they don't need flowery add-ons such as 'Choking back tears she told the Commissioner the heartbreaking story of how...'

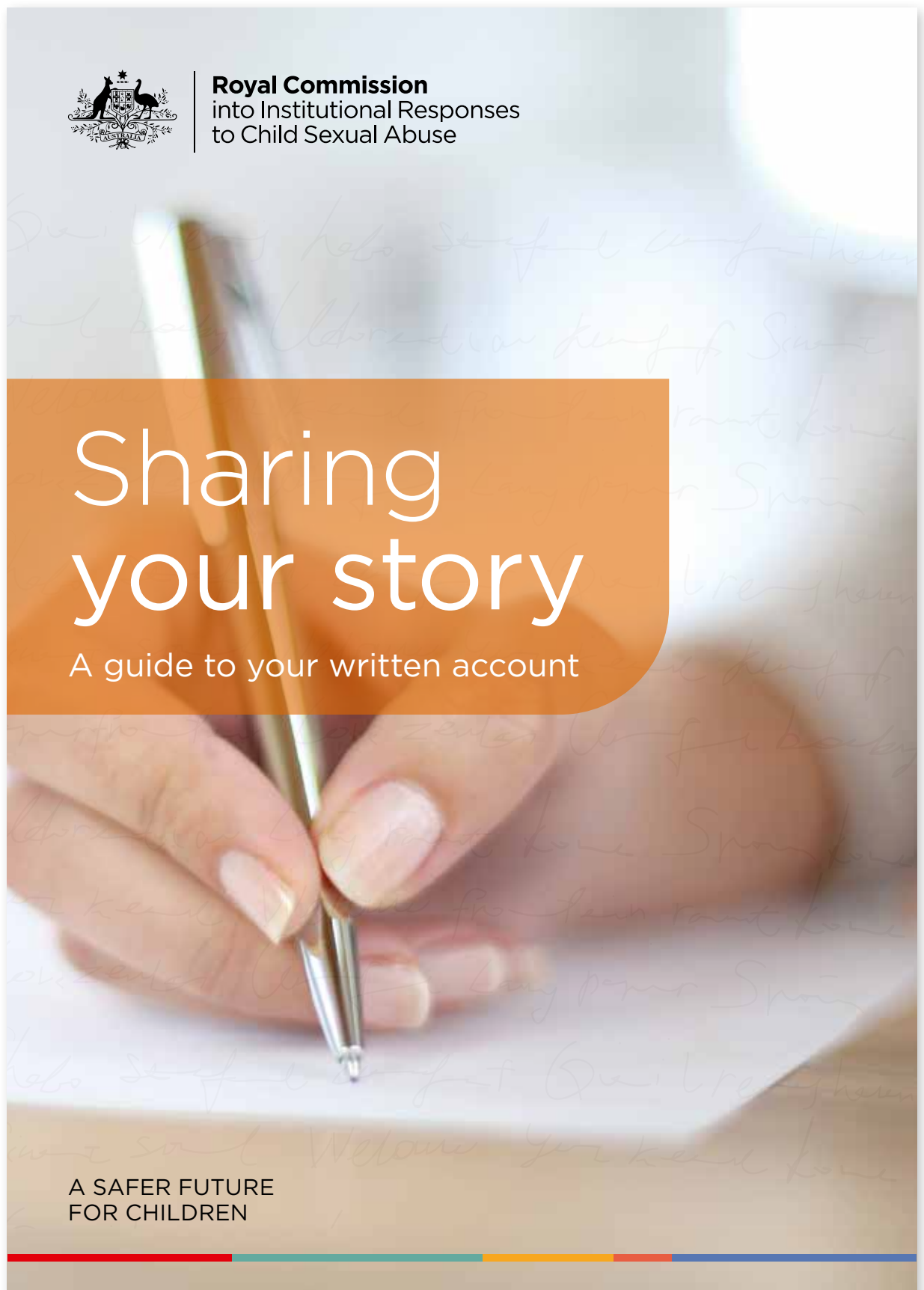
**Follow chronological order:** this is a helpful rule. Follow it and your stories will be easier to write and read. But feel free to break it when you have good reason. What's a good reason? A story might work best if you open with a vivid anecdote about the attendee's adult life and then 'flash back' to when they were a child.

**Include the positives as well as the negatives:** for example, what characteristics does a survivor display in times of extreme hardship?

**Take care with graphic material:** there is no hard and fast rule for dealing with graphic material. On the one hand, we must avoid being salacious; on the other hand we must honestly depict the horror of child sexual abuse and be faithful to the attendee's story as they told it. Usually a balance can be struck. If in doubt, put it to the team and have a chat.

**Write with your own unique flair:** Don't get bogged down by all these guidelines, and don't feel you have to mimic exactly the style of other stories. Diversity is good. Keep it clear, concise and compelling, but do it your own way.

# Appendix M Sharing your story: A guide to your written account



## Your story matters



Thank you for sharing your story with the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission acknowledges that it is a big step, and values your courage in coming forward.

If you would like to share your story with the Royal Commission in writing, you can send a letter or email.

If you need help doing this, a staff member from the Royal Commission can help you, or you can get help from a support service, family member or a friend.

This booklet will help you to answer some questions you may have about sharing your story and guide you to provide a written account of your experiences.



## Sharing your story in a written account

You should tell us your story in your own words. It doesn't matter if you don't remember everything.

To help you prepare your written account, this booklet has a list of questions on page 5 that may guide you. It also explains what it means to share your story in a written account. You can answer all or just some of the questions. Many questions may not be relevant. You don't have to answer them all. The important thing is what you want to tell the Commission.

Your story can be typed, emailed or handwritten and you don't have to put your name on your written account. However, including your name will help us to contact you if we require more information. You may wish to include your name but tell the Royal Commission that you want your name kept confidential.

If you have previously provided a written statement to another inquiry or to the police you may provide us with a copy of that statement.

You will receive written confirmation from the Royal Commission that we have received your story in writing.

### Will my story be kept confidential?

The Royal Commission is bound by legislation to keep the information you provide confidential.

If you wish, the Royal Commission can pass the information you provide to the appropriate law enforcement body on your behalf. This will usually be done only with your agreement, unless the Chair of the Royal Commission believes that disclosing certain information will stop a person from being harmed.

The Royal Commission can also pass on information to law enforcement agencies without consent if a person discloses an offence that has been, or is being, committed. This could include a disclosure of sexual offending against children.

## What will happen with the information I provide?



The information you provide will help the Royal Commission to understand the impact of child sexual abuse in institutions and how it might be prevented in the future. The Royal Commission may use the information to help it decide what further investigations it should undertake.

The Royal Commission may also use the information you provide in your written account in our reports. If you agree to it, your information will be 'de-identified'. This means that your identity (and any other information that could reveal your identity) will not be published in our reports.



Once the Royal Commission has received your written account we will contact you to confirm we have it. Your written account will be read by a Commissioner, and you will be sent a letter of acknowledgement.

### Help is on hand

We understand that sharing your story may be hard. It might be the first time that you have told anyone about the abuse and it may bring back painful memories.

If you need help sharing your story, or coping with the feelings that come with sharing your story, we can put you in touch with support services in your area that can help.

If someone has supported you in the past, you may want to reconnect with them so they can help you through this process.

Sharing your story is important and we will help you every step of the way.

## Questions that may help you share your story with the Royal Commission

The questions below are only a guide, and you do not have to answer all of them. It doesn't matter if you don't remember everything or don't know an answer to a question.

### What happened

1. Are you telling us about child sexual abuse that happened to you?

- ☐ Yes, it happened to me
- ☐ No, it happened to someone else. What is your relationship to that person?

2. Where did the sexual abuse happen? If you can remember, tell us:

- ☐ Institution
- ☐ City/Town
- ☐ State

3. When, or around when, did the abuse happen? If you can remember, provide us with a date, or a range of dates. Can you remember your age at the time?

4. Can you tell us what happened?

5. Did anyone else see what happened?

- ☐ Yes. Who?
- ☐ No/not sure

6. Did you tell anyone about it around the time when it happened?

☐ Yes. Who?

☐ No

### Reporting to the institution

1. Did you report the sexual abuse to the institution?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. Who at the institution did you tell about it? If you can remember, tell us their name and/or position.

3. What did you tell them?

4. When, or around when, did you tell them? If you can remember, provide us with the date or range of dates.

5. Did you put it in writing?

☐ Yes. Do you have a copy of it?

☐ No

6. Did you wait some time before telling the institution?

☐ Yes. If yes, why?

☐ No

### The institution's response

1. Did the institution do anything when you told it about the sexual abuse?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No/not sure
2. How did the institution first respond?
3. What else did the institution do about it?
4. Did the institution investigate what happened to you?
  - ☐ Yes. If yes, how did they investigate?
  - ☐ No/Not sure
5. Did you feel encouraged by the institution for reporting the abuse?
  - ☐ Yes. Why?
  - ☐ No. Why not?
6. Did the institution offer you any help or support?
  - ☐ Yes. What help did they offer you?
  - ☐ No (Skip to question 9)
7. Did you accept the help or support they offered?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

8. To accept their help or support, did you have to agree to any conditions (like keeping it confidential)?
- ☐ Yes. What were those conditions?
  - ☐ No
9. Did the institution accept responsibility for what happened?
- ☐ Yes. How? For example, did they apologise to you personally or in a public statement?
  - ☐ No
10. Did the institution encourage you to report the abuse to the police?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

### Reporting to the police

1. Did you report the sexual abuse to the police?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No. Was there a reason why you didn't? Would you like us to report it for you?
2. If you reported the abuse to the police, who did you tell? Where and when? If you can remember, provide the police officer's name, police station and the date.
3. What did the police do?

4. Did the police charge the accused person?

☐ Yes

☐ No/Not sure

5. Did you give evidence in a criminal case?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. What was the result for the accused person?

### Compensation

1. Did you seek compensation for the sexual abuse?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. How did you seek compensation? For example, did you go to court, attend mediation, go through a formal compensation process, or approach the institution directly?

3. Did you receive a compensation payment?

☐ Yes. How much was the payment? Was it enough? Who paid it?

☐ No

4. Were there any conditions attached (like keeping it confidential)?

☐ Yes. What were they?

☐ No

5. Did you have help from a lawyer when you sought compensation?

☐ Yes

☐ No. Did the institution encourage you to seek independent legal advice before agreeing to any compensation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. How long did it take for you to receive compensation, from when you first requested it?

7. Were you satisfied with the compensation process?

☐ Yes. Why?

☐ No. Why not?

## Support

1. Have you received any emotional or psychological support since the sexual abuse?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
2. What support if any, have you had?
3. What support if any, are you getting now?
4. Is there any support you would like to have?

## Other inquiries

1. Have you told your story of child sexual abuse to another inquiry?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
2. If yes, which inquiry was it? What was its name?
3. How did you tell your story to that inquiry?  
☐ Made a written submission  
☐ Gave evidence in public  
☐ Gave evidence in private.



### Your recommendations for change

1. Please let us know if you have suggestions that we should consider, or any other information you would like to share with us.
2. Do you have suggestions for changes to the institution's policies or procedures?
3. Is there anything you would like us to recommend to the government?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?

Can we use any part of your story if we take out people's names and other identifying details?

☐ Yes

☐ No

## Legal assistance

All information provided to the Royal Commission is protected by law.

Most people do not need legal assistance to talk to the Royal Commission. However, if you have legal questions or concerns about telling your story to the Royal Commission, you can contact knowmore, a free legal advisory service.

For more information visit [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au) or free call knowmore on 1800 605 762.

## Contact us

### General enquiries

8am - 8pm AEST/AEDT  
Monday to Friday (excluding  
national public holidays).

Callers within Australia  
– 1800 099 340  
Toll free number. Calls from  
a mobile or pay telephone  
will attract additional charges.

Callers from overseas  
– 61 2 8815 2319

### Postal address

GPO Box 5283  
Sydney NSW 2001


### Email and website

[contact@childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au)

[www.childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au)

### Social media

 [www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm](http://www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm)

 [@CARoyalComm](https://twitter.com/CARoyalComm)





**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

# Appendix N Quantitative information for all survivors

The following tables present information from survivors' accounts told to the Royal Commission in private sessions. *n* denotes the number of survivors who provided information on a specific issue.

## Profile of all survivors

**Table N.1 – Gender, private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	4,422	64.3
Female	2,437	35.4
Other <sup>a</sup>	5	0.1
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	11	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral.

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided.

**Table N.2 – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	985	14.3
No/Unknown	5,890	85.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.3 – Survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors with disability at the time of the abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	293	4.3
No/Unknown	6,582	95.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.4 – Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Culturally and linguistically diverse survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	213	3.1
No/Unknown	6,662	96.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.5 – Survivors in prison at the time of the private session for all survivors, private sessions May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors in prison at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	713	10.4
No/Unknown	6,162	89.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.6 – Children and young people (under 25) at the time of the private session, May 2013 – May 2017**

Children and young people (under 25) as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	285	4.1
No/Unknown	6,590	95.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.7 – Age at the time of the private session, all survivors May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
0–9 years	46	0.7
10–17 years	96	1.4
18–29 years	288	4.2
30–39 years	672	9.8
40–49 years	1,576	22.9
50–59 years	2,013	29.3
60–69 years	1,432	20.8
70+ years	502	7.3
Deceased	118	1.7
Unknown	132	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.8 – Time period when first sexually abused, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Time period when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
pre-1950	206	3.0
1950–59	752	10.9
1960–69	1,518	22.1
1970–79	1,584	23.0
1980–89	1,057	15.4
1990–99	390	5.7
2000+	279	4.1
Unknown	1,089	15.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Experiences of abuse

**Table N.9 – Age at first sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, male and female survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of male survivors	Proportion of male survivors (%)	Number of female survivors	Proportion of female survivors (%)
Known	3,792	85.8	2,101	86.2
Unknown	630	14.2	336	13.8
<i>Of known (males n=3,792; females n=2,101)</i>				
0–4 years	136	3.6	210	10.0
5–9 years	1,053	27.8	777	37.0
10–14 years	2,175	57.4	863	41.1
15–17 years	428	11.3	251	11.9

**Table N.10 – Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	6,346	92.3
Unknown	529	7.7
<i>Of known (n=6,346)</i>		
Single episode	1,318	20.8
Multiple episodes	5,397	85.0

Note: Survivors sexually abused in multiple institutions could provide multiple responses, depending on the frequency of abuse at each institution.

**Table N.11 – Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of male survivors	Proportion of male survivors (%)	Number of female survivors	Proportion of female survivors (%)
Known	3,295	74.5	1,811	74.3
Unknown	1,127	25.5	626	25.7
<i>Of known (males n=3,295; females n=1,811)</i>				
0–1 years	2,035	61.8	947	52.3
2–5 years	1,181	35.8	677	37.4
6–10 years	292	8.9	260	14.4
More than 10 years	34	1.0	70	3.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses if they were sexually abused for different durations in multiple institutions.

**Table N.12 – Type of sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	5,967	86.8
Unknown	908	13.2
<i>Of known (n=5,967)</i>		
Non-penetrative contact abuse	4,332	72.6
Penetration	3,313	55.5
Violation of privacy	1,429	23.9
Grooming	1,362	22.8
Exposure to sexual acts and material	740	12.4
Child sexual exploitation	162	2.7
Other	355	5.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.



**Table N.13 – Other forms of maltreatment, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Other forms of maltreatment as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	3,936	57.3
Unknown	2,939	42.7
<i>Of known (n=3,936)</i>		
Emotional abuse	3,175	80.7
Physical abuse	2,536	64.4
Witnessing the abuse of others	712	18.1
Neglect	616	15.7
Child labour	445	11.3

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Institution profile

**Table N.14 – Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
One institution	5,386	78.3
Two institutions	1,054	15.3
Three or more institutions	387	5.6
Unknown	48	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.15 – Number and proportion of survivors by institution type, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Out-of-home care	2,858	41.6
Historical (pre-1990)	(2,478)	(36.0)
Contemporary (1990 onwards)	(257)	(3.7)
Unknown era	(150)	(2.2)
Schools	2,186	31.8
Religious activities	1,000	14.5
Youth detention	551	8.0
Recreation, sports and clubs	408	5.9
Health and allied	192	2.8
Armed Forces	76	1.1
Supported accommodation	68	1.0
Family and youth support services	61	0.9
Childcare	32	0.5
Youth employment	17	0.2
Other	213	3.1
Unknown	63	0.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table N.16 – Institution management where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Institution management where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Non-government religious	4,029	58.6
Government	2,203	32.0
Non-government non-religious	714	10.4
Unknown	720	10.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table N.17 – Number and proportion of survivors by institution under religious management, as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Religion for religious institution where child sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in a religious institution (%; n=4,029)	Proportion of all survivors (%; n=6,875)
Catholic	2,489	61.8	36.2
Anglican	594	14.7	8.6
The Salvation Army	294	7.3	4.3
Protestant	169	4.2	2.5
Presbyterian and Reformed	117	2.9	1.7
Uniting Church	97	2.4	1.4
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	75	1.9	1.1
Jehovah's Witnesses	70	1.7	1.0
Baptist	40	1.0	0.6
Pentecostal	37	0.9	0.5
Brethren	33	0.8	0.5
Churches of Christ	29	0.7	0.4
Judaism	25	0.6	0.4
Seventh-day Adventist	25	0.6	0.4
Lutheran	22	0.5	0.3
Latter-day Saints	7	0.2	0.1
Miscellaneous religions <sup>b</sup>	7	0.2	0.1
Islam	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Baha'i	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Eastern Orthodox	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Hinduism	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Oriental Orthodox	< 5	< 0.2	< 0.1
Unknown	20	0.5	0.3

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

<sup>b</sup> Miscellaneous religions' includes but is not limited to Scientology, The Family and Satanism. These non-Christian groups are not coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

**Table N.18 – Number of people who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of people who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Single person	4,312	62.7
Multiple people	2,494	36.3
Unknown	69	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table N.19 – Age of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	4,625	67.3
Unknown	2,250	32.7
<i>Of known (n=4,625)</i>		
Adult (18 and over)	3,878	83.8
Child (under 18)	1,129	24.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table N.20 – Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	6,449	93.8
Female	748	10.9
Other	13	0.2
Unknown	358	5.2

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table N.21 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, number and proportion all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	6,564	95.5
Unknown	311	4.5
<i>Of known (n=6,564)</i>		
Person in religious ministry	2,113	32.2
Teacher	1,378	21.0
Residential care worker	902	13.7
Foster carer	744	11.3
Dormitory master/Housemaster	401	6.1
Custodial staff	384	5.9
Institution's ancillary staff	266	4.1
Medical practitioner/nurse	251	3.8
Volunteer at institution	199	3.0
Youth group leader	179	2.7
Sporting coach	145	2.2
Family member	140	2.1
Adult attending institution	67	1.0
Stranger	54	0.8
Police officer	49	0.7
Church lay leader	26	0.4
Caseworker	21	0.3
Long day care carer	12	0.2
After-school carer	9	0.1
Other <sup>a</sup>	1,974	30.1

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were sexually abused by a child.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Experiences of disclosure

**Table N.22 – Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	6,112	88.9
Unknown	763	11.1
<i>Of known (n=6,112)</i>		
Child (under 18)	2,601	42.6
Adult (18 and over)	3,511	57.4

**Table N.23 – People and organisations disclosed to, as told to us in private sessions, all survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

People and organisations disclosed to, as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	5,518	80.3
Unknown	1,357	19.7
<i>Of known (n=5,518)</i>		
Person in authority inside institution	1,346	24.4
Parent	1,330	24.1
Police/Criminal justice representative/JIRT <sup>a</sup>	1,058	19.2
Therapist/Counsellor	804	14.6
Partner	793	14.4
Royal Commission <sup>b</sup>	570	10.3
Sibling	416	7.5
Welfare/Child protection officer/Social worker	200	3.6
Medical personnel/Healthcare worker	181	3.3
Other relative	170	3.1
Other child	148	2.7
Adult friend	113	2.0
Lawyer	58	1.1
Friend	48	0.9
Redress scheme	39	0.7
Other adult/staff member within institution	23	0.4
Person from educational facility	19	0.3
Survivor/Advocacy group member	18	0.3
Commission/Inquiry	17	0.3
Person from religious institution	17	0.3
Son or daughter	14	0.3
Person within government organisation or department	8	0.1
Other	1,042	18.9

<sup>a</sup> Joint Investigative Response Teams.

<sup>b</sup> First disclosure of child sexual abuse.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table N.24 – Barriers to disclosure for all survivors, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Barriers to disclosure as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	4,592	66.8
Unknown	2,283	33.2
<i>Of known (n=4,592)</i>		
Shame, embarrassment	1,883	41.0
No one to disclose to	1,350	29.4
Fear of not being believed	1,207	26.3
Fear of retribution	1,124	24.5
Just wanted to forget	721	15.7
Did not want anyone else to know	716	15.6
Felt guilty	625	13.6
Didn't know the behaviour was not OK	375	8.2
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	278	6.1
Regarded as private	244	5.3
Abuser threatened victim/family/other	244	5.3
Believed they were special	143	3.1
Did not feel safe	134	2.9
Believed the abuser loved them	121	2.6
Did not trust others	119	2.6
Organisation/institution had too much esteem within household	82	1.8
Did not want specific person to know	48	1.0
Did not remember	45	1.0
Fear of being thought homosexual	31	0.7
Made to feel complicit	18	0.4
Fear of being thought a perpetrator	17	0.4
Denial	10	0.2
Other	1,111	24.2

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Wellbeing

**Table N.25 – Impacts of child sexual abuse for all survivors, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivor as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	6,412	93.3
Unknown	463	6.7
<i>Of known (n=6,412)</i>		
Impact on mental health	6,088	94.9
Impact on relationships	4,332	67.6
Educational and/or economic impacts	3,569	55.7
Impact on sexual behaviour	1,554	24.2
Involvement in criminal activity	1,456	22.7
Impact on physical health	461	7.2
Direct physical impact	440	6.9
Any positive impact	32	0.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.



# Appendix O Quantitative information for children and young people

This section examines the experiences of survivors who were sexually abused in institutions in recent times. This analysis of contemporary institutional child sexual abuse is based on the experiences of children (aged under 18) and young people (aged 18 to 24) who attended a private session, or whose family members attended.

In the following tables, *n* denotes the total number of survivors who provided information on the issue.

## Profile of children and young people

**Table O.1 – Gender, private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	143	50.2
Female	142	49.8
Other <sup>a</sup>	0	0.0
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral.

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided.

**Table O.2 – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	44	15.4
No/Unknown	241	84.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table O.3 – Children and young people with disability at the time of the sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Children and young people with disability at the time of the sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	45	15.8
No/Unknown	240	84.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table O.4 – Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	12	4.2
No/Unknown	273	95.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table O.5 – Survivors in prison, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors in prison at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	49	17.2
No/Unknown	236	82.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table O.6 – Age of children and young people at the time of the private session, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
0–4 years	3	1.1
5–9 years	43	15.1
10–14 years	53	18.6
15–17 years	43	15.1
18–24 years	138	48.4
Deceased	5	1.8
Unknown	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Experiences of abuse

**Table O.7 – Age at first sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	217	76.1
Unknown	68	23.9
<i>Of known (n=217)</i>		
0–4 years	28	12.9
5–9 years	75	34.6
10–14 years	83	38.2
15–17 years	31	14.3

**Table O.8 – Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	218	76.5
Unknown	67	23.5
<i>Of known (n=218)</i>		
Single episode	52	23.9
Multiple episodes	170	78.0

Note: Survivors sexually abused in multiple institutions could provide multiple responses, depending on the frequency of abuse at each institution.

**Table O.9 – Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	184	64.6
Unknown	101	35.4
<i>Of known (n=184)</i>		
0–1 years	144	78.3
2–5 years	34	18.5
6–10 years	10	5.4
More than 10 years	0	0.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses if they were sexually abused for different durations in multiple institutions.

**Table O.10 – Type of sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	218	76.5
Unknown	67	23.5
<i>Of known (n=218)</i>		
Non-penetrative contact abuse	124	56.9
Penetration	104	47.7
Grooming	45	20.6
Exposure to sexual acts and material	39	17.9
Violation of privacy	39	17.9
Child sexual exploitation	12	5.5
Other	19	8.7

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table O.11 – Other forms of maltreatment, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Other forms of maltreatment as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	111	38.9
Unknown	174	61.1
<i>Of known (n=111)</i>		
Emotional abuse	86	77.5
Physical abuse	58	52.3
Neglect	7	6.3
Witnessing the abuse of others	7	6.3
Child labour	0	0.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Institution profile

**Table O.12 – Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
One institution	257	90.2
Two institutions	20	7.0
Three or more institutions	4	1.4
Unknown	4	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table O.13 – Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Out-of-home care	102	35.8
Historical (pre-1990)	(0)	(0.0)
Contemporary (1990 onwards)	(101)	(35.4)
Unknown era	(1)	(0.4)
Schools	78	27.4
Religious activities	22	7.7
Youth detention	21	7.4
Childcare	16	5.6
Recreation, sports and clubs	13	4.6
Family and youth support services	9	3.2
Supported accommodation	6	2.1
Armed Forces	3	1.1
Youth employment	1	0.4
Other	24	8.4
Unknown	4	1.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table O.14 – Institution management where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Institution management where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Non-government religious	71	24.9
Government	104	36.5
Non-government non-religious	42	14.7
Unknown	83	29.1

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table O.15 – Religion for religious institutions as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Religion for religious institution where child sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in a religious institution (%; n=71)	Proportion of all survivors (%; n=285)
Catholic	23	32.4	8.1
Anglican	15	21.1	5.3
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	6	8.5	2.1
The Salvation Army	6	8.5	2.1
Lutheran	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Seventh-day Adventist	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Uniting Church	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Churches of Christ	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Islam	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Jehovah's Witnesses	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Pentecostal	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Judaism	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Latter-day Saints	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0
Presbyterian and Reformed	< 5	< 8.0	< 2.0

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

**Table O.16 – Number of people who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of people who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Single person	226	79.3
Multiple people	53	18.6
Unknown	6	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table O.17 – Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	219	76.8
Unknown	66	23.2
<i>Of known (n=219)</i>		
Adult (18 and over)	135	61.6
Child (under 18)	94	42.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table O.18 – Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	247	86.7
Female	38	13.3
Other	0	0.0
Unknown	15	5.3

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table O.19 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013- May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	264	92.6
Unknown	21	7.4
<i>Of known (n=264)</i>		
Foster carer	72	27.3
Teacher	26	9.8
Custodial staff	14	5.3
Family member	13	4.9
Person in religious ministry	9	3.4
Institution's ancillary staff	8	3.0
Residential care worker	7	2.7
Sporting coach	6	2.3
Volunteer at institution	6	2.3
After-school carer	5	1.9
Caseworker	3	1.1
Long day carer	3	1.1
Adult attending institution	2	0.8
Church lay leader	1	0.4
Dormitory master/Housemaster	1	0.4
Police officer	1	0.4
Stranger	1	0.4
Youth group leader	1	0.4
Other <sup>a</sup>	125	47.3

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were abused by a child.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.



## Experiences of disclosure

**Table O.20 – Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	239	83.9
Unknown	46	16.1
<i>Of known (n=239)</i>		
Child (under 18)	190	79.5
Adult (18 and over)	49	20.5

**Table O.21 – People and organisations disclosed to, as told to us in private sessions, children and young people, May 2013 – May 2017**

People and organisations disclosed to, as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	202	70.9
Unknown	83	29.1
<i>Of known (n=202)</i>		
Parent	108	53.5
Person in authority inside institution	47	23.3
Police/Criminal justice representative/JIRT <sup>a</sup>	44	21.8
Royal Commission <sup>b</sup>	18	8.9
Therapist/Counsellor	18	8.9
Welfare/Child protection officer/Social worker	14	6.9
Other relative	10	5.0
Sibling	8	4.0
Other child	5	2.5
Medical personnel/Healthcare worker	4	2.0
Adult friend	3	1.5
Friend	1	0.5
Lawyer	1	0.5
Partner	1	0.5
Person from educational facility	1	0.5
Survivor/Advocacy group member	1	0.5
Other	23	11.4

<sup>a</sup> Joint Investigative Response Teams.

<sup>b</sup> First disclosure of child sexual abuse.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table O.22 – Barriers to disclosure for children and young people, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Barriers to disclosure as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	132	46.3
Unknown	153	53.7
<i>Of known (n=132)</i>		
Shame, embarrassment	33	25.0
Fear of retribution	27	20.5
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	22	16.7
Didn't know the behaviour was not OK	19	14.4
No one to disclose to	16	12.1
Did not want anyone else to know	13	9.8
Fear of not being believed	13	9.8
Abuser threatened victim/family/other	13	9.8
Felt guilty	7	5.3
Just wanted to forget	7	5.3
Regarded as private	5	3.8
Believed they were special	5	3.8
Believed the abuser loved them	3	2.3
Did not feel safe	3	2.3
Made to feel complicit	1	0.8
Did not remember	1	0.8
Did not want specific person to know	1	0.8
Other	51	38.6

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Wellbeing

**Table O.23 – Impacts of child sexual abuse for children and young people, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivor as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	219	76.8
Unknown	66	23.2
<i>Of known (n=219)</i>		
Impact on mental health	199	90.9
Educational and/or economic impacts	98	44.7
Impact on relationships	63	28.8
Involvement in criminal activity	51	23.3
Impact on sexual behaviour	34	15.5
Direct physical impact	15	6.8
Impact on physical health	11	5.0
Any positive impact	1	0.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

# Appendix P Quantitative information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

In the following tables, *n* denotes the total number of survivors who provided information on the issue.

## Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

**Table P.1 – Gender, private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	535	54.3
Female	447	45.4
Other <sup>a</sup>	1	0.1
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	2	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral.

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided.

**Table P.2 – Children and young people among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Children and young people (under 25) as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	44	4.5
No/Unknown	941	95.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table P.3 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse, private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	47	4.8
No/Unknown	938	95.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table P.4 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors in prison at the time of the private session, private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors in prison at the time of the private session as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	230	23.4
No/Unknown	755	76.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table P.5 – Age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors at the time of the private session, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at the time of the private session as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
0–9 years	2	0.2
10–17 years	10	1.0
18–29 years	67	6.8
30–39 years	133	13.5
40–49 years	218	22.1
50–59 years	316	32.1
60–69 years	178	18.1
70+ years	47	4.8
Deceased	10	1.0
Unknown	4	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table P.6 - Time period when first sexually abused, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Time period when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
pre-1990	786	79.8
1990 onwards	133	13.5
Unknown	66	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Experiences of abuse

**Table P.7 – Age at first sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	777	78.9
Unknown	208	21.1
<i>Of known (n=777)</i>		
0–4 years	61	7.9
5–9 years	295	38.0
10–14 years	359	46.2
15–17 years	62	8.0

**Table P.8 – Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	897	91.1
Unknown	88	8.9
<i>Of known (n=897)</i>		
Single episode	169	18.8
Multiple episodes	781	87.1

Note: Survivors sexually abused in multiple institutions could provide multiple responses, depending on the frequency of abuse at each institution.

**Table P.9 – Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	632	64.2
Unknown	353	35.8
<i>Of known (n=632)</i>		
0–1 years	343	54.3
2–5 years	228	36.1
6–10 years	93	14.7
More than 10 years	19	3.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses if they were abused for different durations in multiple institutions.

**Table P.10 – Type of sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	827	84.0
Unknown	158	16.0
<i>Of known (n=827)</i>		
Non-penetrative contact abuse	558	67.5
Penetration	519	62.8
Violation of privacy	222	26.8
Grooming	106	12.8
Exposure to sexual acts and material	76	9.2
Child sexual exploitation	23	2.8
Other	43	5.2

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table P.11 – Other forms of maltreatment, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Other forms of maltreatment as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	655	66.5
Unknown	330	33.5
<i>Of known (n=655)</i>		
Physical abuse	516	78.8
Emotional abuse	509	77.7
Neglect	162	24.7
Witnessing the abuse of others	122	18.6
Child labour	110	16.8

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Institution profile

**Table P.12 – Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
One institution	701	71.2
Two institutions	209	21.2
Three or more institutions	67	6.8
Unknown	8	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table P.13 – Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Out-of-home care	739	75.0
Historical (pre-1990)	(609)	(61.8)
Contemporary (1990 onwards)	(80)	(8.1)
Unknown era	(59)	(6.0)
Youth detention	150	15.2
Schools	99	10.1
Religious activities	53	5.4
Health and allied	20	2.0
Recreation, sports and clubs	10	1.0
Supported accommodation	10	1.0
Family and youth support services	8	0.8
Armed Forces	5	0.5
Childcare	2	0.2
Youth employment	1	0.1
Other	43	4.4
Unknown	10	1.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.



**Table P.14 – Institution management where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Institution management where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Non-government religious	428	43.5
Government	454	46.1
Non-government non-religious	36	3.7
Unknown	235	23.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table P.15 – Religion for religious institutions, as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Religion for religious institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in a religious institution (%; n=428)	Proportion of all survivors (%; n=985)
Catholic	220	51.4	22.3
Protestant	60	14.0	6.1
Anglican	51	11.9	5.2
The Salvation Army	38	8.9	3.9
Presbyterian and Reformed	16	3.7	1.6
Brethren	12	2.8	1.2
Churches of Christ	11	2.6	1.1
Uniting Church	11	2.6	1.1
Baptist	10	2.3	1.0
Seventh-day Adventist	7	1.6	0.7
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	6	1.4	0.6
Lutheran	< 5	< 1.0	< 0.5
Jehovah's Witnesses	< 5	< 1.0	< 0.5
Unknown	< 5	< 1.0	< 0.5

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

**Table P.16 – Number of people who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of people who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Single person	517	52.5
Multiple people	458	46.5
Unknown	10	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table P.17 – Age of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	701	71.2
Unknown	284	28.8
<i>Of known (n=701)</i>		
Adult (18 and over)	530	75.6
Child (under 18)	255	36.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table P.18 – Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	912	92.6
Female	155	15.7
Other	4	0.4
Unknown	64	6.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table P.19 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	926	94.0
Unknown	59	6.0
<i>Of known (n=926)</i>		
Foster carer	216	23.3
Residential care worker	180	19.4
Person in religious ministry	166	17.9
Custodial staff	101	10.9
Teacher	67	7.2
Dormitory master/Housemaster	61	6.6
Medical practitioner/nurse	39	4.2
Family member	36	3.9
Institution's ancillary staff	36	3.9
Volunteer at institution	16	1.7
Stranger	15	1.6
Sporting coach	8	0.9
Youth group leader	8	0.9
Adult attending institution	7	0.8
Police officer	7	0.8
Caseworker	3	0.3
Church lay leader	1	0.1
Other <sup>a</sup>	364	39.3

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were abused by a child.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Experiences of disclosure

**Table P.20 – Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017 17**

Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	867	88.0
Unknown	118	12.0
<i>Of known (n=867)</i>		
Child (under 18)	362	41.8
Adult (18 and over)	505	58.2

**Table P.21 – People and organisations disclosed to, as told to us in private sessions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, May 2013 – May 2017**

People and organisations disclosed to, as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	739	75.0
Unknown	246	25.0
<i>Of known (n=739)</i>		
Person in authority inside institution	141	19.1
Royal Commission <sup>a</sup>	131	17.7
Parent	97	13.1
Police/Criminal justice representative/JIRT <sup>b</sup>	95	12.9
Therapist/Counsellor	85	11.5
Sibling	68	9.2
Partner	66	8.9
Welfare/Child protection officer/Social worker	52	7.0
Other relative	39	5.3
Medical personnel/Healthcare worker	21	2.8
Other child	16	2.2
Redress scheme	15	2.0
Adult friend	14	1.9
Lawyer	11	1.5
Friend	9	1.2
Commission/Inquiry	5	0.7
Other adult/staff member within institution	5	0.7
Survivor/Advocacy group member	5	0.7
Person from educational facility	4	0.5
Person from religious institution	3	0.4
Person within government organisation/department	3	0.4
Son or daughter	3	0.4
Other	135	18.3

<sup>a</sup> First disclosure of child sexual abuse.

<sup>b</sup> Joint Investigative Response Teams.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table P.22 – Barriers to disclosure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Barriers to disclosure as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	695	70.6
Unknown	290	29.4
<i>Of known (n=695)</i>		
Shame, embarrassment	304	43.7
No one to disclose to	219	31.5
Fear of retribution	188	27.1
Fear of not being believed	145	20.9
Just wanted to forget	125	18.0
Did not want anyone else to know	99	14.2
Felt guilty	58	8.3
Did not feel safe	44	6.3
Abuser threatened victim/family/other	41	5.9
Regarded as private	39	5.6
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	29	4.2
Didn't know the behaviour was not OK	27	3.9
Did not trust others	22	3.2
Did not want specific person to know	12	1.7
Believed the abuser loved	11	1.6
Believed they were special	9	1.3
Organisation/institution had too much esteem within household	6	0.9
Made to feel complicit	5	0.7
Fear of being thought homosexual	4	0.6
Fear of being thought a perpetrator	4	0.6
Did not remember	3	0.4
Other	128	18.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Wellbeing

**Table P.23 – Impacts of child sexual abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivor as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	947	96.1
Unknown	38	3.9
<i>Of known (n=947)</i>		
Impact on mental health	905	95.6
Impact on relationships	664	70.1
Educational and/or economic impacts	530	56.0
Involvement in criminal activity	366	38.6
Impact on sexual behaviour	192	20.3
Impact on physical health	75	7.9
Direct physical impact	74	7.8
Any positive impact	3	0.3

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

# Appendix Q Quantitative information for survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

In the following tables, *n* denotes the total number of survivors who provided information on the issue.

## Profile of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

**Table Q.1 – Gender, private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	149	70.0
Female	63	29.6
Other <sup>a</sup>	0	0.0
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral.

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided.

**Table Q.2 – Children and young people survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Children and young people (under 25) as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	12	5.6
No/Unknown	201	94.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table Q.3 – Survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with disability at the time of the abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	3	1.4
No/Unknown	210	98.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table Q.4 – Survivors in prison at the time of the private session from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors in prison at the time of the private session as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	32	15.0
No/Unknown	181	85.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table Q.5 – Age of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds at the time of the private session, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
0–9 years	1	0.5
10–17 years	4	1.9
18–29 years	15	7.0
30–39 years	24	11.3
40–49 years	48	22.5
50–59 years	50	23.5
60–69 years	54	25.4
70+ years	8	3.8
Deceased	3	1.4
Unknown	6	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table Q.6 – Time period when first sexually abused, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Time period when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
pre-1990	171	80.3
1990 onwards	29	13.6
Unknown	13	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>



## Experiences of abuse

**Table Q.7 – Age at first sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	185	86.9
Unknown	28	13.1
<i>Of known (n=185)</i>		
0–4 years	6	3.2
5–9 years	61	33.0
10–14 years	91	49.2
15–17 years	27	14.6

**Table Q.8 – Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	198	93.0
Unknown	15	7.0
<i>Of known (n=198)</i>		
Single episode	44	22.2
Multiple episodes	168	84.8

Note: Survivors sexually abused in multiple institutions could provide multiple responses, depending on the frequency of abuse at each institution.

**Table Q.9 – Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	161	75.6
Unknown	52	24.4
<i>Of known (n=161)</i>		
0–1 years	98	60.9
2–5 years	61	37.9
6–10 years	11	6.8
More than 10 years	1	0.6

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses if they were abused for different durations in multiple institutions.

**Table Q.10 – Type of sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	184	86.4
Unknown	29	13.6
<i>Of known (n=184)</i>		
Non-penetrative contact abuse	146	79.3
Penetration	85	46.2
Violation of privacy	45	24.5
Grooming	39	21.2
Exposure to sexual acts and material	23	12.5
Child sexual exploitation	0	0.0
Other	4	2.2

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table Q.11 – Other forms of maltreatment, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Other forms of maltreatment as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	113	53.1
Unknown	100	46.9
<i>Of known (n=113)</i>		
Emotional abuse	93	82.3
Physical abuse	64	56.6
Witnessing the abuse of others	20	17.7
Neglect	14	12.4
Child labour	13	11.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Institution profile

**Table Q.12 – Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
One institution	175	82.2
Two institutions	29	13.6
Three or more institutions	8	3.8
Unknown	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table Q.13 – Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Schools	75	35.2
Out-of-home care	74	34.7
Historical (pre-1990)	(68)	(31.9)
Contemporary (1990 onwards)	(5)	(2.3)
Unknown era	(1)	(0.5)
Religious activities	40	18.8
Youth detention	26	12.2
Recreation, sports and clubs	10	4.7
Health and allied	5	2.3
Family and youth support services	2	0.9
Youth employment	2	0.9
Armed Forces	1	0.5
Childcare	1	0.5
Supported accommodation	1	0.5
Other	4	1.9
Unknown	2	0.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table Q.14 – Institution management where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Institution management where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Non-government religious	128	60.1
Government	69	32.4
Non-government non-religious	19	8.9
Unknown	16	7.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table Q.15 – Religion for religious institutions, as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Religion for religious institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in a religious institution (%; n=128)	Proportion of all survivors (%; n=213)
Catholic	74	57.8	34.7
Judaism	24	18.8	11.3
Anglican	9	7.0	4.2
Jehovah's Witnesses	5	3.9	2.3
The Salvation Army	5	3.9	2.3
Islam	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Presbyterian and Reformed	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Eastern Orthodox	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Uniting Church	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Oriental Orthodox	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Protestant	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0
Seventh-day Adventist	< 5	< 3.0	< 2.0

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

**Table Q.16 – Number of people who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of people who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Single person	142	66.7
Multiple people	67	31.5
Unknown	4	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table Q.17 – Age of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	145	68.1
Unknown	68	31.9
<i>Of known (n=145)</i>		
Adult (18 and over)	119	82.1
Child (under 18)	35	24.1

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table Q.18 – Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	195	91.5
Female	19	8.9
Other	1	0.5
Unknown	13	6.1

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table Q.19 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	203	95.3
Unknown	10	4.7
<i>Of known (n=203)</i>		
Person in religious ministry	66	32.5
Teacher	49	24.1
Custodial staff	18	8.9
Residential care worker	18	8.9
Foster carer	14	6.9
Dormitory master/Housemaster	10	4.9
Institution's ancillary staff	9	4.4
Volunteer at institution	9	4.4
Medical practitioner/nurse	6	3.0
Youth group leader	4	2.0
Sporting coach	3	1.5
Church lay leader	2	1.0
Family member	2	1.0
After-school care carer	1	0.5
Adult attending institution	1	0.5
Long day care carer	1	0.5
Stranger	1	0.5
Other <sup>a</sup>	59	29.1

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were abused by a child.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Experiences of disclosure

**Table Q.20 – Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	191	89.7
Unknown	22	10.3
<i>Of known (n=191)</i>		
Child (under 18)	91	47.6
Adult (18 and over)	100	52.4

**Table Q.21 – People and organisations disclosed to, as told to us in private sessions, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, May 2013 – May 2017**

People and organisations disclosed to, as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	174	81.7
Unknown	39	18.3
<i>Of known (n=174)</i>		
Person in authority inside institution	42	24.1
Parent	37	21.3
Police/Criminal justice representative/JIRT <sup>a</sup>	35	20.1
Therapist/Counsellor	29	16.7
Partner	27	15.5
Royal Commission <sup>b</sup>	22	12.6
Sibling	11	6.3
Medical personnel/Healthcare worker	10	5.7
Other child	8	4.6
Adult friend	5	2.9
Lawyer	2	1.1
Other relative	2	1.1
Welfare/Child protection officer/Social worker	2	1.1
Other adult/staff member within institution	1	0.6
Person from educational facility	1	0.6
Other	27	15.5

<sup>a</sup> Joint Investigative Response Teams.

<sup>b</sup> First disclosure of child sex abuse.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table Q.22 – Barriers to disclosure for survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Barriers to disclosure as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	129	60.6
Unknown	84	39.4
<i>Of known (n=129)</i>		
Shame, embarrassment	60	46.5
No one to disclose to	33	25.6
Fear of retribution	30	23.3
Fear of not being believed	27	20.9
Did not want anyone else to know	24	18.6
Felt guilty	22	17.1
Just wanted to forget	20	15.5
Didn't know the behaviour was not OK	15	11.6
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	10	7.8
Regarded as private	9	7.0
Abuser threatened victim/family/other	8	6.2
Believed they were special	5	3.9
Did not want specific person to know	4	3.1
Organisation/institution had too much esteem within household	3	2.3
Believed the abuser loved him/her	3	2.3
Did not feel safe	3	2.3
Did not trust others	3	2.3
Made to feel complicit	2	1.6
Did not remember	1	0.8
Other	42	32.6

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.



## Wellbeing

**Table Q.23 – Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivor as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	196	92.0
Unknown	17	8.0
<i>Of known (n=196)</i>		
Impact on mental health	187	95.4
Impact on relationships	140	71.4
Educational and/or economic impacts	111	56.6
Impact on sexual behaviour	59	30.1
Involvement in criminal activity	47	24.0
Impact on physical health	15	7.7
Direct physical impact	12	6.1
Any positive impact	2	1.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

# Appendix R Quantitative information for survivors with disability at the time of the abuse

This section examines the experiences of survivors who told Commissioners they were a child with disability at the time of the abuse. This section does not include survivors who had disability at the time of the private session but not at time of the abuse.

In the following tables, *n* denotes the total number of survivors who provided information on the issue.

## Profile of survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse

**Table R.1 – Gender of survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	180	61.4
Female	112	38.2
Other <sup>a</sup>	1	0.3
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral.

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided.

**Table R.2 – Children and young people among survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Children and young people (under 25) as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	45	15.4
No/Unknown	248	84.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table R.3 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors among survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	47	16.0
No/Unknown	246	84.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table R.4 – Survivors in prison at the time of the private session among survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors in prison at the time of the private session as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	36	12.3
No/Unknown	257	87.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table R.5 –Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds among survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Culturally and linguistically diverse survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	3	1.0
No/Unknown	290	99.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table R.6 – Age of survivors in the private session for with survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
0–9 years	2	0.7
10–17 years	19	6.5
18–29 years	35	11.9
30–39 years	36	12.3
40–49 years	79	27.0
50–59 years	69	23.5
60–69 years	35	11.9
70+ years	11	3.8
Deceased	0	0.0
Unknown	7	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table R.7 – Time period when first sexually abused, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Time period when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
pre-1990	202	68.9
1990 onwards	76	25.9
Unknown	15	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Experiences of abuse

**Table R.8 – Age at first sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	257	87.7
Unknown	36	12.3
<i>Of known (n=257)</i>		
0–4 years	13	5.1
5–9 years	78	30.4
10–14 years	122	47.5
15–17 years	44	17.1

**Table R.9 – Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	266	90.8
Unknown	27	9.2
<i>Of known (n=266)</i>		
Single episode	46	17.3
Multiple episodes	229	86.1

Note: Survivors sexually abused in multiple institutions could provide multiple responses, depending on the frequency of abuse at each institution.

**Table R.10 – Duration of sexual abuse in a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	223	76.1
Unknown	70	23.9
<i>Of known (n=223)</i>		
0–1 years	140	62.8
2–5 years	73	32.7
6–10 years	29	13.0
More than 10 years	6	2.7

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses if they were abused for different durations in multiple institutions.

**Table R.11 – Type of sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	248	84.6
Unknown	45	15.4
<i>Of known (n=248)</i>		
Non-penetrative contact abuse	159	64.1
Penetration	140	56.5
Violation of privacy	62	25.0
Grooming	42	16.9
Exposure to sexual acts and material	34	13.7
Child sexual exploitation	11	4.4
Other	20	8.1

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table R.12 – Other forms of maltreatment, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Other forms of maltreatment as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	182	62.1
Unknown	111	37.9
<i>Of known (n=182)</i>		
Emotional abuse	145	79.7
Physical abuse	123	67.6
Witnessing the abuse of others	37	20.3
Neglect	29	15.9
Child labour	12	6.6

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Institution profile

**Table R.13 – Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
One institution	230	78.5
Two institutions	37	12.6
Three or more institutions	26	8.9
Unknown	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table R.14 – Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Out-of-home care	136	46.4
Historical (pre-1990)	(100)	(34.1)
Contemporary (1990 onwards)	(27)	(9.2)
Unknown era	(12)	(4.1)
Schools	95	32.4
Health and allied	30	10.2
Religious activities	17	5.8
Youth detention	15	5.1
Recreation, sports and clubs	11	3.8
Family and youth support services	9	3.1
Supported accommodation	4	1.4
Childcare	1	0.3
Youth employment	1	0.3
Armed Forces	0	0.0
Other	14	4.8
Unknown	1	0.3

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table R.15 – Institution management where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Institution management where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Non-government religious	122	41.6
Government	130	44.4
Non-government non-religious	48	16.4
Unknown	35	11.9

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table R.16 – Religion for religious institutions, as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Religion for religious institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in a religious institution (%; n=122)	Proportion of all survivors (%; n=293)
Catholic	74	60.7	25.3
Anglican	17	13.9	5.8
Uniting Church	9	7.4	3.1
The Salvation Army	8	6.6	2.7
Presbyterian and Reformed	6	4.9	2.0
Protestant	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Baptist	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Jehovah's Witnesses	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Pentecostal	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Brethren	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Lutheran	< 5	< 4.0	< 2.0
Unknown	2	1.6	0.7

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

**Table R.17 – Number of people who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of people who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Single person	172	58.7
Multiple people	120	41.0
Unknown	1	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Table R.18 – Age of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	212	72.4
Unknown	81	27.6
<i>Of known (n=212)</i>		
Adult (18 and over)	158	74.5
Child (under 18)	75	35.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table R.19 – Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	275	93.9
Female	38	13.0
Other	0	0.0
Unknown	23	7.8

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table R.20 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	281	95.9
Unknown	12	4.1
<i>Of known (n=281)</i>		
Person in religious ministry	49	17.4
Residential care worker	46	16.4
Teacher	41	14.6
Foster carer	39	13.9
Institution's ancillary staff	31	11.0
Medical practitioner/nurse	20	7.1
Custodial staff	17	6.0
Dormitory master/Housemaster	12	4.3
Family member	9	3.2
Volunteer at institution	6	2.1
Youth group leader	6	2.1
Adult attending institution	3	1.1
Sporting coach	2	0.7
Stranger	2	0.7
Long day care carer	1	0.4
Police officer	1	0.4
Other <sup>a</sup>	116	41.3

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were abused by a child.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Experiences of disclosure

**Table R.21 – Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	251	85.7
Unknown	42	14.3
<i>Of known (n=251)</i>		
Child (under 18)	153	61.0
Adult (18 and over)	98	39.0

**Table R.22 – People and organisations disclosed to, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

People and organisations disclosed to, as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	224	76.5
Unknown	69	23.5
<i>Of known (n=224)</i>		
Parent	68	30.4
Person in authority inside institution	58	25.9
Police/Criminal justice representative/JIRT <sup>a</sup>	39	17.4
Therapist/Counsellor	36	16.1
Sibling	18	8.0
Partner	15	6.7
Royal Commission <sup>b</sup>	14	6.3
Medical personnel/Healthcare worker	9	4.0
Other relative	7	3.1
Welfare/Child protection officer/Social worker	7	3.1
Adult friend	6	2.7
Other child	4	1.8
Friend	2	0.9
Lawyer	2	0.9
Other adult/staff member within institution	2	0.9
Commission/Inquiry	1	0.4
Person from educational facility	1	0.4
Person from religious institution	1	0.4
Survivor/Advocacy group member	1	0.4
Other	40	17.9

<sup>a</sup> Joint Investigative Response Teams

<sup>b</sup> First disclosure of child sexual abuse.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table R.23 – Barriers to disclosure for survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Barriers to disclosure as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	176	60.1
Unknown	117	39.9
<i>Of known (n=176)</i>		
Shame, embarrassment	55	31.3
Fear of retribution	53	30.1
No one to disclose to	40	22.7
Fear of not being believed	37	21.0
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	20	11.4
Did not want anyone else to know	19	10.8
Felt guilty	17	9.7
Just wanted to forget	16	9.1
Didn't know the behaviour was not OK	15	8.5
Abuser threatened victim/family/other	12	6.8
Regarded as private	8	4.5
Did not feel safe	8	4.5
Did not trust others	8	4.5
Did not want specific person to know	5	2.8
Believed they were special	4	2.3
Believed the abuser loved them	3	1.7
Organisation/institution had too much esteem within household	2	1.1
Did not remember	2	1.1
Made to feel complicit	1	0.6
Fear of being thought a perpetrator	1	0.6
Other	52	29.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Wellbeing

**Table R.24 – Impacts of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors with disability at the time of the abuse, May 2013 – May 2017**

Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	266	90.8
Unknown	27	9.2
<i>Of known (n=266)</i>		
Impact on mental health	249	93.6
Impact on relationships	144	54.1
Educational and/or economic impacts	126	47.4
Involvement in criminal activity	64	24.1
Impact on sexual behaviour	61	22.9
Direct physical impact	19	7.1
Impact on physical health	18	6.8
Any positive impact	0	0.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

# Appendix S Quantitative information for survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session

In the following tables, *n* denotes the total number of survivors who provided information on the issue.

## Profile of survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session

**Table S.1 – Gender, private sessions, survivors in adult prison May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	649	91.0
Female	63	8.8
Other <sup>a</sup>	1	0.1
Unknown <sup>b</sup>	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' refers to victims who were gender-diverse or gender neutral.

<sup>b</sup> 'Unknown' indicates information about the victim's gender was not provided.

**Table S.2 – Children and young people (under 25) among survivors in adult prison, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Children and young people (under 25) as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	49	6.9
No/Unknown	664	93.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.3 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors among survivors in adult prison, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	230	32.3
No/Unknown	483	67.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.4 – Survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse among survivors in adult prison, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Survivors with disability at the time of the sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	36	5.0
No/Unknown	677	95.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.5 – Survivors in adult prison from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Culturally and linguistically diverse survivors as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Yes	32	4.5
No/Unknown	681	95.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.6 – Age of survivors in adult prison at the time of the private session, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at the time of the private session	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
0–9 years	0	0.0
10–17 years	0	0.0
18–29 years	106	14.9
30–39 years	227	31.8
40–49 years	229	32.1
50–59 years	106	14.9
60–69 years	28	3.9
70+ years	13	1.8
Deceased	1	0.1
Unknown	3	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.7 – Time period when first sexually abused, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Time period when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
pre-1990	380	53.3
1990 onwards	220	30.9
Unknown	113	15.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Experiences of abuse

**Table S.8 – Age at first sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age when first sexually abused as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	514	72.1
Unknown	199	27.9
<i>Of known (n=514)</i>		
0–4 years	14	2.7
5–9 years	121	23.5
10–14 years	301	58.6
15–17 years	78	15.2

**Table S.9 – Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Frequency of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	663	93.0
Unknown	50	7.0
<i>Of known (n=663)</i>		
Single episode	145	21.9
Multiple episodes	575	86.7

Note: Survivors sexually abused in multiple institutions could provide multiple responses, depending on the frequency of abuse at each institution.

**Table S.10 – Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Duration of sexual abuse within a single institution as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	428	60.0
Unknown	285	40.0
<i>Of known (n=428)</i>		
0–1 years	306	71.5
2–5 years	120	28.0
6–10 years	25	5.8
More than 10 years	7	1.6

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses if they were abused for different durations in multiple institutions.



**Table S.11 – Type of sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	613	86.0
Unknown	100	14.0
<i>Of known (n=613)</i>		
Non-penetrative contact abuse	401	65.4
Penetration	363	59.2
Violation of privacy	147	24.0
Grooming	121	19.7
Exposure to sexual acts and material	57	9.3
Child sexual exploitation	28	4.6
Other	39	6.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table S.12 – Other forms of maltreatment, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Other forms of maltreatment as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	441	61.9
Unknown	272	38.1
<i>Of known (n=441)</i>		
Emotional abuse	319	72.3
Physical abuse	318	72.1
Witnessing the abuse of others	44	10.0
Neglect	41	9.3
Child labour	11	2.5

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Institution profile

**Table S.13 – Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
One institution	462	64.8
Two institutions	183	25.7
Three or more institutions	66	9.3
Unknown	2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.14 – Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Type of institution where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Out-of-home care	360	50.5
Historical (pre-1990)	(190)	(26.6)
Contemporary (1990 onwards)	(109)	(15.3)
Unknown era	(73)	(10.2)
Youth detention	233	32.7
Schools	114	16.0
Religious activities	42	5.9
Recreation, sports and clubs	30	4.2
Health and allied	17	2.4
Supported accommodation	12	1.7
Family and youth support services	8	1.1
Armed Forces	6	0.8
Childcare	3	0.4
Youth employment	3	0.4
Other	40	5.6
Unknown	3	0.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses

**Table S.15 – Institution management where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Institution management where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Non-government religious	221	31.0
Government	442	62.0
Non-government non-religious	51	7.2
Unknown	117	16.4

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table S.16 – Religion for religious institutions, as coded in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG, 2016), where sexual abuse occurred, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Religion for religious institutions where sexual abuse occurred as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors in a religious institution (%; n=221)	Proportion of all survivors (%; n=713)
Catholic	147	66.5	20.6
Anglican	32	14.5	4.5
The Salvation Army	16	7.2	2.2
Protestant	9	4.1	1.3
Other Christian <sup>a</sup>	7	3.2	1.0
Uniting Church	7	3.2	1.0
Presbyterian and Reformed	5	2.3	0.7
Baptist	< 5	< 2.0	< 0.5
Pentecostal	< 5	< 2.0	< 0.5
Seventh-day Adventist	< 5	< 2.0	< 0.5
Churches of Christ	< 5	< 2.0	< 0.5
Unknown	1	0.5	0.1

<sup>a</sup> 'Other Christian' includes but is not limited to Unitarian, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Fundamentalist Evangelical, Christian Outreach and Christadelphians. These Christian groups are not individually coded in the ASCRG, 2016.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Adult perpetrators and children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

**Table S.17 – Number of people who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Number of people who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Single person	383	53.7
Multiple people	317	44.5
Unknown	13	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table S.18 – Age of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	567	79.5
Unknown	146	20.5
<i>Of known (n=567)</i>		
Adult (18 and over)	489	86.2
Child (under 18)	149	26.3

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table S.19 – Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Gender of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Male	660	92.6
Female	77	10.8
Other	4	0.6
Unknown	50	7.0

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table S.20 – Role of the person who sexually abused the victim, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Role of the person who sexually abused the victim as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	658	92.3
Unknown	55	7.7
<i>Of known (n=658)</i>		
Custodial staff	186	28.3
Person in religious ministry	127	19.3
Residential care worker	97	14.7
Foster carer	96	14.6
Teacher	59	9.0
Family member	27	4.1
Medical practitioner/nurse	24	3.6
Dormitory master/Housemaster	21	3.2
Institution's ancillary staff	20	3.0
Stranger	15	2.3
Youth group leader	14	2.1
Adult attending institution	13	2.0
Police officer	8	1.2
Caseworker	7	1.1
Sporting coach	6	0.9
Church lay leader	5	0.8
Volunteer at institution	5	0.8
Other <sup>a</sup>	202	30.7

<sup>a</sup> Other includes survivors who told Commissioners in private sessions they were sexually abused by a child.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

## Experiences of disclosure

**Table S.21 – Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

Age at first disclosure of child sexual abuse as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	591	82.9
Unknown	122	17.1
<i>Of known (n=591)</i>		
Child (under 18)	254	43.0
Adult (18 and over)	337	57.0

**Table S.22 – People and organisations disclosed to, as told to us in private sessions, survivors in adult prison, May 2013 – May 2017**

People and organisations disclosed to, as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	487	68.3
Unknown	226	31.7
<i>Of known (n=487)</i>		
Royal Commission <sup>a</sup>	153	31.4
Person in authority inside institution	89	18.3
Parent	86	17.7
Police/Criminal justice representative/JIRT <sup>b</sup>	58	11.9
Therapist/Counsellor	55	11.3
Partner	39	8.0
Welfare/Child protection officer/Social worker	26	5.3
Lawyer	17	3.5
Medical personnel/Healthcare worker	16	3.3
Sibling	12	2.5
Other child	11	2.3
Friend	10	2.1
Other relative	9	1.8
Redress scheme	8	1.6
Commission/Inquiry	5	1.0
Adult friend	4	0.8
Other adult/staff member within institution	4	0.8
Person from educational facility	3	0.6
Person within government organisation/department	3	0.6
Person from religious institution	1	0.2
Survivor/Advocacy group member	1	0.2
Other	49	10.1

<sup>a</sup> First disclosure of child sexual abuse.

<sup>b</sup> Joint Investigative Response Teams.

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses.

**Table S.23 – Barriers to disclosure for survivors in adult prison, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Barriers to disclosure as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	536	75.2
Unknown	177	24.8
<i>Of known (n=536)</i>		
Shame, embarrassment	233	43.5
No one to disclose to	124	23.1
Fear of retribution	117	21.8
Fear of not being believed	82	15.3
Just wanted to forget	81	15.1
Did not want anyone else to know	66	12.3
Did not feel safe	46	8.6
Did not trust others	39	7.3
Felt guilty	27	5.0
Didn't know the behaviour was not OK	27	5.0
Regarded as private	27	5.0
Abuser threatened victim/family/other	18	3.4
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	13	2.4
Did not want specific person to know	13	2.4
Believed they were special	12	2.2
Fear of being thought a perpetrator	8	1.5
Believed the abuser loved them	7	1.3
Made to feel complicit	6	1.1
Fear of being thought homosexual	6	1.1
Organisation/institution had too much esteem within household	4	0.7
Did not remember	4	0.7
Other	122	22.8

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses

## Wellbeing

**Table S.24 – Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivors in adult prison, as told to us in private sessions, May 2013 – May 2017**

Impacts of child sexual abuse for survivor as told to the Royal Commission	Number of survivors	Proportion of survivors (%)
Known	710	99.6
Unknown	3	0.4
<i>Of known (n=710)</i>		
Impact on mental health	674	94.9
Involvement in criminal activity	664	93.5
Impact on relationships	454	63.9
Educational and/or economic impacts	349	49.2
Impact on sexual behaviour	163	23.0
Impact on physical health	47	6.6
Direct physical impact	26	3.7
Any positive impact	5	0.7

Note: Survivors could provide multiple responses



# Endnotes

- 1 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth)
- 2 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, pp 27–37. Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, *Royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody*, Commonwealth of Australia Vol 1, 1991.
- 3 Name changed, private session, ‘Carly’ (sibling); Name changed, private session, ‘Tui’.
- 4 This number represents the number of victims and survivors who attended or were represented at a private session between May 2013 and May 2017. It is less than the total number of private sessions conducted during this time period as a few survivors had two private sessions and some parents had two private sessions – one with and one without their child. Whistleblowers were also included in the count of private sessions conducted but not in the count of victims and survivors. Victims and survivors continued to attend private sessions between June and November 2017. Their accounts of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts were not available for inclusion in this volume. However, high level information about their experiences was included in the insert to the Executive Summary.
- 5 Name changed, private session, ‘Jody’.
- 6 Name changed, private session, ‘Jody’.
- 7 Australia, House of Representatives, 13 February 2013, Debates, vol HR2, pp 1,116–1,117.
- 8 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 6OC(2).
- 9 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 6OC(1).
- 10 As told to us by survivors during their private session, in feedback to counsellors, in the cards and letters sent to the Royal Commission and as passed on to us by advocacy groups.
- 11 Name changed, private session, ‘Marlene’.
- 12 knowmore is an independent service that provides free legal advice to people who are considering telling their story or providing information to the Royal Commission. For more information see knowmore, *knowmore*, 2017, [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au).
- 13 In this report, ‘attende’ refers to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, as well as family members, friends and whistleblowers. Where the experience of a particular person is profiled, the appropriate pronoun is used (eg victim rather than attendee).
- 14 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 6OG.
- 15 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 6P.
- 16 Where possible, victims liaised with the same counsellor before, immediately after and in the weeks following their private session.
- 17 Names changed, group private session, ‘Tammy, Tony, Terry, Harvey’.
- 18 Names changed, group private session, ‘Tammy, Tony, Terry, Harvey’.
- 19 Name changed, private session, ‘Imogen’.
- 20 Name changed, private session, ‘Imogen’.
- 21 Name changed, private session, ‘Kathryn’.
- 22 Name changed, private session, ‘Kathryn’.
- 23 Regions included: Northern New South Wales and the Central West region, Darwin, Alice Springs, the Tiwi Islands, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands and Port Augusta in South Australia, South eastern and western Queensland, Perth, Geraldton, the Kimberley region in Western Australia.
- 24 Find & Connect, *Kinchela Training Home for Aboriginal Boys (1923–1970)*, 2017, [www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/nsw/NE00955](http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/nsw/NE00955) (viewed 14 June 2017).
- 25 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, pp 160, 167.
- 26 Names changed, private session, ‘Gerry Ann and Rachel’.
- 27 Names changed, private session, ‘Gerry Ann and Rachel’.
- 28 *Royal Commissions Amendment Act 2013* (NSW).
- 29 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 6OH.
- 30 Section 6OM of the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* provides that private sessions information will be in the ‘open access period’ after 99 years. Once the open access period starts, release of information is still subject to exemptions set out in s 33 of the *Archives Act 1983*, which include breach of confidence or unreasonable disclosure of the personal affairs of a person.
- 31 *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth) s 6P.
- 32 I Katz, A Jones, B Newtown & E Reimer, *Life journeys of victim/survivors of child sexual abuse: An analysis of Royal Commission private sessions*, report prepared for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2017.
- 33 Tests to determine statistically significant differences were not performed because the quantitative information was not deemed to be suitable for analysis of this nature. Specifically, the high rates of missing information across some variables were unlikely to be missing at random; and inferences to a broader group of survivors who did not attend a private session were explicitly outside of the scope of this project.
- 34 For example, survivors with disability who did not mention the frequency of abuse they experienced have not been included in either the calculation of the proportion of survivors who experienced a single episode of abuse, or in the calculation of those who experienced multiple episodes.
- 35 The small proportion of survivors giving accounts of ‘recent’ abuse should not be interpreted as a low prevalence of sexual abuse among children today. As indicated by research and by the accounts of survivors in private sessions, many victims do not disclose the details of the abuse for many decades.



- [illegible]

- [illegible]



- [illegible]

133 Name changed, private session, 'Imogen'.

134 Name changed, private session, 'Imogen'.

135 For example, children and young people who did not mention the frequency of abuse they experienced have not been included in either the calculation of the proportion of children and young people who experienced a single episode of abuse, or in the calculation of those who experienced multiple episodes.

136 Name changed, private session, 'Chanel'.

137 Name changed, private session, 'Brianna'.

138 Name changed, private session, 'Logan Reece'.

139 Name changed, private session, 'Logan Reece'.

140 Name changed, private session, 'Olwyn' (parent).

141 Name changed, private session, 'Alfreda' (parent).

142 Name changed, private session, 'Alfreda' (parent).

143 Name changed, private session, 'Logan Reece'.

144 Name changed, private session, 'Logan Reece'.

145 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.

146 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.

147 Name changed, private session, 'Chanel'.

148 Name changed, private session, 'Brianna'.

149 Name changed, private session, 'Gaby' (parent).

150 Name changed, private session, 'Gaby' (parent).

151 Name changed, private session, 'Brianna'.

152 Name changed, private session, 'Brianna'.

153 Name changed, private session, 'Kathrin' (parent).

154 Name changed, private session, 'Kathrin' (parent).

155 Name changed, private session, 'Sondra' (parent).

156 Names changed, private session, 'Lindy and Jackson'.

157 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).

158 Name changed, private session, 'Rose' (parent); Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).

159 Name changed, private session, 'Beth Mary' (parent).

160 Names changed, private session, 'Marisa and Lucas'.

161 Names changed, private session, 'Marisa and Lucas'.

162 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).

163 Name changed, private session, 'Velma' (parent).

164 Name changed, private session, 'Velma' (parent).

165 Name changed, private session, 'Velma' (parent).

166 Names changed, private session, 'Ingrid and Marla'.

167 Names changed, private session, 'Ingrid and Marla'.

168 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.

169 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.

170 Name changed, private session, 'Lexie' (parent).

171 Name changed, private session, 'Lexie' (parent).

172 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.

173 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.

174 Name changed, private session, 'Elana' (parent); Name changed, private session, 'Georgia April'.

175 Name changed, private session, 'Elana' (parent); Name changed, private session, 'Georgia April'.

176 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.

177 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.

178 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).

179 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).

180 Name changed, private session, 'Gaby' (parent).

181 Name changed, private session, 'Jordan'.

182 Name changed, private session, 'Elana' (parent); Name changed, private session, 'Georgia April'.

183 Name changed, private session, 'Kathrin'.

184 Name changed, private session, 'Kathrin'.

185 Name changed, private session, 'Alfreda' (parent).

186 Name changed, private session, 'Beth Mary' (parent).

187 Name changed, private session, 'Beth Mary' (parent).

188 Name changed, private session, 'Nola' (parent).

189 Name changed, private session, 'Nola' (parent).

190 Name changed, private session, 'Helen Christine' (parent).

191 Name changed, private session, 'Helen Christine' (parent).

192 Name changed, private session, 'Nadine' (parent).

193 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).

194 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.

195 Name changed, private session, 'Elise' (parent).

196 Name changed, private session, 'Helen Christine' (parent).

- 197 Name changed, private session, 'Helen Christine' (parent).  
 198 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).  
 199 Name changed, private session, 'Rose' (parent).  
 200 Name changed, private session, 'Rose' (parent).  
 201 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, pp 27–37; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report Volume 1*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991.
- 202 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 397.
- 203 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 36.
- 204 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 37.
- 205 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 3.
- 206 P Anderson, M Bamblett, D Bessarab, L Bromfield, S Chan, G Maddock, K Menzies, M O'Connell, G Pearson, R Walker & M Wright, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts*, report for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2017.
- 207 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report Volume 2*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991.
- 208 S Swain, *History of child protection legislation*, report prepared for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2014, p 7, p 87.
- 209 P Anderson, M Bamblett, D Bessarab, L Bromfield, S Chan, G Maddock, K Menzies, M O'Connell, G Pearson, R Walker & M Wright, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts*, report for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2017, pp 12–13, 16–17.
- 210 MYH Brave Heart, 'The historical trauma response among natives and its relationship with substance abuse: A Lakota illustration', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol 35, no 1, 2003, pp 7–13; P Dudgeon, H Milroy & R Walker (eds), *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, ACT, 2014, p 294.
- 211 J Atkinson, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines: The transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2002.
- 212 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997; J Atkinson, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines: The transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2002.
- 213 JA De Maio, SR Zubrick, SR Silburn, DM Lawrence, FG Mitrou & RB Dalby, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Measuring the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and the intergenerational effects of forced separation*, vol 2, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2005, p 2; J Atkinson, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines: The transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2002; M Braveheart-Jordan & L DeBruyn, 'So she may walk in balance: Integrating the impact of historical trauma in the treatment of Native American Indian women' in J Adleman & G Enguidanos (eds), *Racism in the lives of women: Testimony, theory, and guides to antiracist practice*, Haworth Press, New York, 1995, pp 345–68; P Menzies, 'Intergenerational trauma from a mental health perspective', 2010, pp 63–85; L Kirmeyer, G Brass & C Tait, 'The mental health of Aboriginal peoples: Transformations of identity and community', *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol 45, no 7, 2000, pp 607–16; A Bombay, K Matheson & H Anisman, 'Intergenerational trauma: convergence of multiple processes among First nations peoples in Canada', *Journal de la sante autochtone*, vol 5, no 3, 2009.
- 214 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997.
- 215 Government and church affiliation and/or governance information was sourced from a selection of missions and reserves identified by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and/or institution information sourced from Find and Connect: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, 2017, [www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au), (viewed 5 July 2017); Find and Connect, *Find and Connect*, 2017, [www.findandconnect.gov.au](http://www.findandconnect.gov.au) (viewed 5 July 2017).
- 216 For example, survivors who did not mention the frequency of abuse they experienced have not been included in either the calculation of the proportion of survivors who experienced a single episode of abuse, or in the calculation of those who experienced multiple episodes.
- 217 During private sessions survivors commonly used 'taken into care' as a euphemism for forced removal.
- 218 Policy controlled the movement of Aboriginal people and children. Name changed, private session, 'Agnes'.
- 219 Name changed, private session, 'Alec Robert'.
- 220 Name changed, private session, 'Alec Robert'.
- 221 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.
- 222 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.
- 223 Name changed, private session, 'Meggie'.
- 224 Name changed, private session, 'Meggie'.
- 225 Name changed, private session, 'Blake William'.

226 Name changed, private session, 'Blake William'.  
 227 Name changed, private session, 'Kieren'.  
 228 Name changed, private session, 'Kieren'.  
 229 Name changed, private session, 'Kieren'.  
 230 Name changed, private session, 'Shekinah'.  
 231 Name changed, private session, 'Hazel'.  
 232 Name changed, private session, 'Hazel'.  
 233 Name changed, private session, 'Hazel'.  
 234 Name changed, private session, 'Hazel'.  
 235 Name changed, private session, 'Jody'.  
 236 Name changed, private session, 'Jody'.  
 237 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 238 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 239 Name changed, private session, 'Shekinah'.  
 240 Name changed, private session, 'Shekinah'.  
 241 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 242 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 243 Name changed, private session, 'Tansy'.  
 244 Name changed, private session, 'Tansy'.  
 245 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 246 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 247 Name changed, private session, 'Cory'.  
 248 Name changed, private session, 'Judith'.  
 249 Name changed, private session, 'Judith'.  
 250 Name changed, private session, 'Lynda'.  
 251 Name changed, private session, 'Lynda'.  
 252 Name changed, private session, 'Dee'.  
 253 Name changed, private session, 'Dee'.  
 254 Name changed, private session, 'Rainey'.  
 255 Name changed, private session, 'Rainey'.  
 256 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997.  
 257 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 258 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 259 Name changed, private session, 'Raquel'.  
 260 During private sessions survivors commonly used 'taken into care' as a euphemism for forced removal.  
 261 Name changed, private session, 'Raquel'.  
 262 During private sessions survivors commonly used 'taken into care' as a euphemism for forced removal.  
 263 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 264 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 265 Name changed, private session, 'Bernard'.  
 266 Name changed, private session, 'Vernon'.  
 267 Name changed, private session, 'Vernon'.  
 268 Name changed, private session, 'Vernon'.  
 269 'Following the successful 1967 constitutional referendum the Commonwealth obtained concurrent legislative power on Aboriginal affairs with the States.' Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 34.  
 270 'Children were often taught to detest everything Aboriginal, and this hatred could extend to themselves once they realised their skin was not white.' Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report Volume 2*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, Section 20.3.30.  
 271 Name changed, private session, 'Skye'.  
 272 Name changed, private session, 'Skye'.  
 273 Name changed, private session, 'Keenan'.  
 274 Name changed, private session, 'Keenan'.  
 275 Name changed, private session, 'Gina'.  
 276 Name changed, private session, 'Gina'.  
 277 Name changed, private session, 'Allannah'.  
 278 Name changed, private session, 'Allannah'.  
 279 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 280 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 281 Name changed, private session, 'Derrick'.  
 282 Name changed, private session, 'Beattie'.



283 Name changed, private session, 'Raelene'.  
 284 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 285 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 286 Name changed, private session, 'Merle'.  
 287 Name changed, private session, 'Merle'.  
 288 Name changed, private session, 'Merle'.  
 289 Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Aims and Core Elements*, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, Victoria, 2013.  
 290 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 437.  
 291 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 1997, p 439.  
 292 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Consultation paper: Institutional responses to child sexual abuse in out-of-home care*, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2016, pp 29–30.  
 293 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 294 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 295 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 296 Name changed, private session, 'Francis Peter'.  
 297 Name changed, private session, 'Francis Peter'.  
 298 Name changed, private session, 'Francis Peter'.  
 299 Name changed, private session, 'Skye'.  
 300 Name changed, private session, 'Skye'.  
 301 Name changed, private session, 'Skye'.  
 302 Name changed, private session, 'Oliver Patrick'.  
 303 Name changed, private session, 'Oliver Patrick'.  
 304 Name changed, private session, 'Oliver Patrick'.  
 305 During private sessions survivors commonly used 'taken into care' as a euphemism for forced removal.  
 306 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 307 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 308 Name changed, private session, 'Dina'.  
 309 Name changed, private session, 'Dina'.  
 310 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 311 Name changed, private session, 'Naomi'.  
 312 Name changed, private session, 'Naomi'.  
 313 Name changed, private session, 'Jameson'.  
 314 Name changed, private session, 'Jameson'.  
 315 Name changed, private session, 'Melissa Jane'.  
 316 Name changed, private session, 'Melissa Jane'.  
 317 Name changed, private session, 'Bernard'.  
 318 Name changed, private session, 'Bernard'.  
 319 Name changed, private session, 'Bernard'.  
 320 Name changed, private session, 'Frederick Paul'.  
 321 Name changed, private session, 'Frederick Paul'.  
 322 Name changed, private session, 'Frederick Paul'.  
 323 Name changed, private session, 'Frederick Paul'.  
 324 Name changed, private session, 'Derrick'.  
 325 Name changed, private session, 'Derrick'.  
 326 Name changed, private session, 'Derrick'.  
 327 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 328 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 329 Name changed, private session, 'Hazel'.  
 330 Name changed, private session, 'Hazel'.  
 331 Name changed, private session, 'Leah'.  
 332 Name changed, private session, 'Leah'.  
 333 Name changed, private session, 'Kalina'.  
 334 Name changed, private session, 'Kalina'.  
 335 Name changed, private session, 'Lauren'.  
 336 Name changed, private session, 'Lauren'.  
 337 Name changed, private session, 'Lauren'.  
 338 Name changed, private session, 'Christine'.  
 339 Name changed, private session, 'Christine'.  
 340 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 341 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.

342 Name changed, private session, 'Rachael'.  
 343 Name changed, private session, 'Rachael'.  
 344 Name changed, private session, 'Rachael'.  
 345 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 346 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 347 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 348 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 349 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 350 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.  
 351 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.  
 352 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 353 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 354 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 355 Name changed, private session, 'Neridah'.  
 356 Name changed, private session, 'Neridah'.  
 357 Name changed, private session, 'Nancey'.  
 358 Name changed, private session, 'Nancey'.  
 359 Name changed, private session, 'Trent James'.  
 360 Name changed, private session, 'Trent James'.  
 361 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.  
 362 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.  
 363 Name changed, private session, 'Raelene'.  
 364 Name changed, private session, 'Raelene'.  
 365 Name changed, private session, 'Raelene'.  
 366 Name changed, private session, 'Deb'.  
 367 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 368 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 369 Name changed, private session, 'Blake William'.  
 370 Name changed, private session, 'Blake William'.  
 371 Name changed, private session, 'Blake William'.  
 372 Name changed, private session, 'Christine'.  
 373 Name changed, private session, 'Christine'.  
 374 Name changed, private session, 'Naomi'.  
 375 Name changed, private session, 'Naomi'.  
 376 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 377 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 378 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 379 Name changed, private session, 'Jonas'.  
 380 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 381 Name changed, private session, 'Sherrill'.  
 382 Name changed, private session, 'Leah'.  
 383 Name changed, private session, 'Leah'.  
 384 Name changed, private session, 'Leah'.  
 385 Name changed, private session, 'Isabelle'.  
 386 Name changed, private session, 'Isabelle'.  
 387 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 388 Name changed, private session, 'Rosie'.  
 389 Name changed, private session, 'Avril'.  
 390 Name changed, private session, 'Avril'.  
 391 Name changed, private session, 'Avril'.  
 392 During private sessions survivors commonly used 'taken into care' as a euphemism for forced removal.  
 393 Name changed, private session, 'Beatrice Jane'.  
 394 Name changed, private session, 'Beatrice Jane'.  
 395 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 396 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 397 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 398 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 399 Name changed, private session, 'Meggie'.  
 400 Name changed, private session, 'Meggie'.  
 401 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 402 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 403 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 404 Name changed, private session, 'Francis Peter'.  
 405 Name changed, private session, 'Francis Peter'.  
 406 Name changed, private session, 'Trent James'.

407 Name changed, private session, 'Trent James'.  
 408 Name changed, private session, 'Loreena'.  
 409 Name changed, private session, 'Loreena'.  
 410 Name changed, private session, 'Vernon Lewis'.  
 411 Name changed, private session, 'Vernon Lewis'.  
 412 Name changed, private session, 'Conner'.  
 413 Name changed, private session, 'Conner'.  
 414 Name changed, private session, 'Merle'.  
 415 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 416 Name changed, private session, 'Bert Terry'.  
 417 Name changed, private session, 'Agnes'.  
 418 Name changed, private session, 'Agnes'.  
 419 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 420 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 421 Name changed, private session, 'Carl'.  
 422 The proportion of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who experienced child sexual abuse in an institutional context in this chapter is unlikely to be representative of the true extent of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the community.  
 423 The Royal Commission heard from many survivors who identified as Former Child Migrants. Only those who also identified as being culturally and linguistically diverse were included in the present analysis.  
 424 For example, survivors who did not mention the frequency of abuse they experienced have not been included in either the calculation of the proportion of survivors who experienced a single episode of abuse, or in the calculation of those who experienced multiple episodes.  
 425 Name changed, private session, 'Alberto'.  
 426 Name changed, private session, 'Alberto'.  
 427 Name changed, private session, 'Alberto'.  
 428 Name changed, private session, 'Rocco'.  
 429 Name changed, private session, 'Rocco'.  
 430 Name changed, private session, 'Rocco'.  
 431 Name changed, private session, 'Rocco'.  
 432 Name changed, private session, 'Maria'.  
 433 Name changed, private session, 'Rosswell'.  
 434 Name changed, private session, 'Rosswell'.  
 435 Name changed, private session, 'Cleo'.  
 436 Name changed, private session, 'Cleo'.  
 437 Name changed, private session, 'Theodore'.  
 438 Name changed, private session, 'Theodore'.  
 439 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 440 Name changed, private session, 'Jansen'.  
 441 Name changed, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 442 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 443 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 444 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 445 Name changed, private session, 'Alessandro'.  
 446 Name changed, private session, 'Alessandro'.  
 447 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 448 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 449 Name changed, private session, 'Alessandro'.  
 450 Name changed, private session, 'Alessandro'.  
 451 Name changed, private session, 'Spiros'.  
 452 Name changed, private session, 'Spiros'.  
 453 Name changed, private session, 'Spiros'.  
 454 Name changed, private session, 'Yiorgos'.  
 455 Name changed, private session, 'Yiorgos'.  
 456 Name changed, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 457 Name changed, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 458 Name changed, private session, 'Joseph John'.  
 459 Name changed, private session, 'Joseph John'.  
 460 Name changed, private session, 'Theodore'.  
 461 Name changed, private session, 'Theodore'.  
 462 Name changed, private session, 'Asad'.  
 463 Name changed, private session, 'Asad'.  
 464 Name changed, private session, 'Spiros'.  
 465 Name changed, private session, 'Spiros'.  
 466 Name changed, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 467 Name changed, private session, 'Carmine'.

468 Name changed, private session, 'Angie'.  
 469 Name changed, private session, 'Lucia'.  
 470 Name changed, private session, 'Lucia'.  
 471 Name changed, private session, 'Denis'.  
 472 Name changed, private session, 'Denis'.  
 473 Name changed, private session, 'Yared'.  
 474 Name changed, private session, 'Yared'.  
 475 Name change, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 476 Name change, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 477 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 478 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 479 Name changed, private session, 'Jarrett'.  
 480 Name changed, private session, 'Wilbur Kenneth'.  
 481 Name changed, private session, 'Yiorgos'.  
 482 Name changed, private session, 'Cleo'.  
 483 Name changed, private session, 'Cleo'.  
 484 Name changed, private session, 'Zita'.  
 485 Name changed, private session, 'Zita'.  
 486 Name changed, private session, 'Zita'.  
 487 Name changed, private session, 'Toby James'.  
 488 Name changed, private session, 'Toby James'.  
 489 Name changed, private session, 'Zahara'.  
 490 Name changed, private session, 'Zahara'.  
 491 Name changed, private session, 'Zahara'.  
 492 Name change, private session, 'Carmine'.  
 493 Name changed, private session, 'Alessandro'.  
 494 Name changed, private session, 'Alessandro'.  
 495 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 496 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 497 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 498 Name changed, private session, 'Vittorio'.  
 499 Name changed, private session, 'Vittorio'.  
 500 Name changed, private session, 'Vittorio'.  
 501 Name changed, private session, 'Cleo'.  
 502 Name changed, private session, 'Cleo'.  
 503 Name changed, private session, 'Kevin John'.  
 504 Name changed, private session, 'Kevin John'.  
 505 Name changed, private session, 'Adib'.  
 506 Name changed, private session, 'Adib'.  
 507 Name changed, private session, 'Darius'.  
 508 Name changed, private session, 'Darius'.  
 509 Name changed, private session, 'Zahara'.  
 510 Name changed, private session, 'Zahara'.  
 511 Name changed, private session, 'Maria'.  
 512 Name changed, private session, 'Maria'.  
 513 Name changed, private session, 'Gary Paul'.  
 514 Name changed, private session, 'Gary Paul'.  
 515 Name changed, private session, 'Gary Paul'.  
 516 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 517 Name changed, private session, 'Tumus'.  
 518 Name changed, private session, 'Adalene'.  
 519 Name changed, private session, 'Adalene'.  
 520 Name changed, private session, 'Ivan Peter'.  
 521 Name changed, private session, 'Ivan Peter'.  
 522 Name changed, private session, 'Wilbur Kenneth'.  
 523 Name changed, private session, 'Wilbur Kenneth'.  
 524 Name changed, private session, 'Maria'.  
 525 Name changed, private session, 'Lotte'.  
 526 Name changed, private session, 'Lotte'.  
 527 Name changed, private session, 'Arlo'.  
 528 Name changed, private session, 'Vittorio'.  
 529 Name changed, private session, 'Gary Paul'.  
 530 G Llewellyn, S Wayland & G Hindmarsh, *Disability and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts*, report prepared for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Sydney, 2016.  
 531 World Health Organization, 'Disability and health', World Health Organization, Geneva, November 2001, [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/) (viewed 5 July 2017).

532 *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, opened for signature 30 March 2007, 2515 UNTS3  
(entered into force 3 May 2008), art 8.

533 Research suggests that children with disability are likely to be at increased risk of child sexual abuse in institutional  
contexts. As such, the proportion of survivors with disability reported in this chapter is unlikely to be representative of  
the true extent of survivors with disability in the community. World Health Organization, 'Disability and health', World  
Health Organization, Geneva, November 2001, [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/) (viewed 5 July 2017).

534 For example, survivors with disability who did not mention the frequency of abuse they experienced have not been  
included in either the calculation of the proportion of survivors who experienced a single episode of abuse, or in the  
calculation of those who experienced multiple episodes.

535 Name changed, private session, 'Noel Henry'.  
536 Name changed, private session, 'Noel Henry'.  
537 Name changed, private session, 'Noel Henry'.  
538 Name changed, private session, 'Jeanette'.  
539 Name changed, private session, 'Jeanette'.  
540 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
541 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
542 Name changed, private session, 'Lydia'.  
543 Name changed, private session, 'Nancy'.  
544 Name changed, private session, 'Nancy'.  
545 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
546 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
547 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
548 Name changed, private session, 'Albert Frank'.  
549 Name changed, private session, 'Albert Frank'.  
550 Name changed, private session, 'Albert Frank'.  
551 Name changed, private session, 'Carly' (sibling).  
552 Name changed, private session, 'Carly' (sibling).  
553 Name changed, private session, 'Carly' (sibling).  
554 Name changed, private session, 'Tui'.  
555 Name changed, private session, 'Tui'.  
556 Name changed, private session, 'Tui'.  
557 Name changed, private session, 'Jameson'.  
558 Name changed, private session, 'Jameson'.  
559 Name changed, private session, 'Maxwell'.  
560 Name changed, private session, 'Maxwell'.  
561 Name changed, private session, 'Helen Christine' (parent).  
562 Name changed, private session, 'Helen Christine' (parent).  
563 Name changed, private session, 'Anita'.  
564 Name changed, private session, 'Anita'.  
565 Name changed, private session, 'Anita'.  
566 Name changed, private session, 'Nadine' (parent).  
567 Name changed, private session, 'Nadine' (parent).  
568 Name changed, private session, 'Lydia'.  
569 Name changed, private session, 'Lydia'.  
570 Name changed, private session, 'Shawn'.  
571 Name changed, private session, 'Shawn'.  
572 Name changed, private session, 'Dudley'.  
573 Name changed, private session, 'Dudley'.  
574 Name changed, private session, 'Dudley'.  
575 Name changed, private session, 'Jason Michael'.  
576 Name changed, private session, 'Jason Michael'.  
577 Name changed, private session, 'Maura'.  
578 Name changed, private session, 'Gina'.  
579 Name changed, private session, 'Roslyn'.  
580 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
581 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
582 Name changed, private session, 'Mia'.  
583 Name changed, private session, 'Mia'.  
584 Name changed, private session, 'Tui'.  
585 Name changed, private session, 'Tui'.  
586 Name changed, private session, 'Will'.  
587 Name changed, private session, 'Will'.  
588 Name changed, private session, 'Morris'.  
589 Name changed, private session, 'Morris'.  
590 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).  
591 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).

592 Name changed, private session, 'Rebecca'.  
 593 Name changed, private session, 'Rebecca'.  
 594 Name changed, private session, 'Rebecca'.  
 595 Name changed, private session, 'Nancy'.  
 596 Name changed, private session, 'Nancy'.  
 597 Name changed, private session, 'Anita'.  
 598 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 599 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 600 Name changed, private session, 'Ally'.  
 601 Name changed, private session, 'Ally'.  
 602 Name changed, private session, 'Rory'.  
 603 Name changed, private session, 'Rory'.  
 604 Name changed, private session, 'Carly' (sibling).  
 605 Name changed, private session, 'Carly' (sibling).  
 606 Name changed, private session, 'Tommy'.  
 607 Name changed, private session, 'Tommy'.  
 608 Name changed, private session, 'Tommy'.  
 609 Name changed, private session, 'Gina'.  
 610 Name changed, private session, 'Gina'.  
 611 Name changed, private session, 'Maxwell'.  
 612 Name changed, private session, 'Will'.  
 613 Name changed, private session, 'Will'.  
 614 Name changed, private session, 'Maxwell'.  
 615 Name changed, private session, 'Maxwell'.  
 616 Name changed, private session, 'Maxwell'.  
 617 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).  
 618 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).  
 619 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).  
 620 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 621 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 622 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 623 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 624 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 625 Name changed, private session, 'Ida'.  
 626 Name changed, private session, 'Will'.  
 627 Name changed, private session, 'Will'.  
 628 Name changed, private session, 'Marko' (brother).  
 629 Name changed, private session, 'Marko' (brother).  
 630 Name changed, private session, 'Leslie'.  
 631 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.  
 632 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.  
 633 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 634 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 635 Name changed, private session, 'Ida'.  
 636 Name changed, private session, 'Ida'.  
 637 Name changed, private session, 'Gina'.  
 638 Name changed, private session, 'Flynn'.  
 639 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.  
 640 Name changed, private session, 'Tyler'.  
 641 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 642 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 643 Name changed, private session, 'Mia'.  
 644 Name changed, private session, 'Mia'.  
 645 Name changed, private session, 'Leeanda'.  
 646 Name changed, private session, 'Leeanda'.  
 647 Name changed, private session, 'Flynn'.  
 648 Name changed, private session, 'Shawn'. Name changed, private session, 'Seth'.  
 649 Name changed, private session, 'Seth'.  
 650 Name changed, private session, 'Shawn'.  
 651 Name changed, private session, 'Toby'.  
 652 Name changed, private session, 'Toby'.  
 653 Name changed, private session, 'Toby'.  
 654 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).  
 655 Name changed, private session, 'Chantelle' (parent).  
 656 Name changed, private session, 'Flynn'.

657 Name changed, private session, 'Rory'.  
 658 Name changed, private session, 'Rory'.  
 659 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
 660 Name changed, private session, 'Angus'.  
 661 Name changed, private session, 'Kade'.  
 662 Name changed, private session, 'Kade'.  
 663 Name changed, private session, 'Emory'.  
 664 Name changed, private session, 'Emory'.  
 665 Name changed, private session, 'Lydia'.  
 666 Name changed, private session, 'Lydia'.  
 667 Name changed, private session, 'Anita'.  
 668 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 669 Name changed, private session, 'Clarice'.  
 670 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, *4517.0 – Prisoners in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2016.  
 At 30 June 2016 there were 35,745 male prisoners and 3,094 female prisoners in Australian prisons. Of the total  
 population of 38,845 prisoners, 92.0 per cent were male and 8.0 per cent were female.  
 671 For example, survivors who did not mention the frequency of abuse they experienced have not been included in  
 either the calculation of the proportion of survivors who experienced a single episode of abuse, or in the calculation  
 of those who experienced multiple episodes.  
 672 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 673 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 674 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 675 Name changed, private session, 'Rusty'.  
 676 Name changed, private session, 'Rusty'.  
 677 Name changed, private session, 'Caspar'.  
 678 Name changed, private session, 'Caspar'.  
 679 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 680 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 681 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 682 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 683 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 684 Name changed, private session, 'Alan Sam'.  
 685 Name changed, private session, 'Alan Sam'.  
 686 Name changed, private session, 'Alan Sam'.  
 687 Name changed, private session, 'Shaun Michael'.  
 688 Name changed, private session, 'Shaun Michael'.  
 689 Name changed, private session, 'Shaun Michael'.  
 690 Name changed, private session, 'Caspar'.  
 691 Name changed, private session, 'Caspar'.  
 692 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 693 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 694 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 695 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 696 Name changed, private session, 'Mason James'.  
 697 Name changed, private session, 'Mason James'.  
 698 Name changed, private session, 'Kayla'.  
 699 Name changed, private session, 'Kayla'.  
 700 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin Jane'.  
 701 Name changed, private session, 'Dani'.  
 702 Name changed, private session, 'Dani'.  
 703 Name changed, private session, 'Dani'.  
 704 Name changed, private session, 'Wesley James'.  
 705 Name changed, private session, 'Wesley James'.  
 706 Name changed, private session, 'Wesley James'.  
 707 Name changed, private session, 'Dermott'.  
 708 Name changed, private session, 'Dermott'.  
 709 Name changed, private session, 'Kent'.  
 710 Name changed, private session, 'Kent'.  
 711 Name changed, private session, 'Arlen'.  
 712 Name changed, private session, 'Arlen'.  
 713 Name changed, private session, 'Ross Andrew'.  
 714 Name changed, private session, 'Ross Andrew'.  
 715 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 716 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 717 Name changed, private session, 'Rusty'.



718 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 719 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 720 Name changed, private session, 'Rusty'.  
 721 Name changed, private session, 'Kent'.  
 722 Name changed, private session, 'Kent'.  
 723 Name changed, private session, 'Pierce'.  
 724 Name changed, private session, 'Pierce'.  
 725 Name changed, private session, 'Joseph John'.  
 726 Name changed, private session, 'Lenny James'.  
 727 Name changed, private session, 'Lenny James'.  
 728 Name changed, private session, 'Carrie'.  
 729 Name changed, private session, 'Carrie'.  
 730 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 731 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 732 Name changed, private session, 'Dawson'.  
 733 Name changed, private session, 'Dawson'.  
 734 Name changed, private session, 'Alexei'.  
 735 Name changed, private session, 'Alexei'.  
 736 Name changed, private session, 'Simeon'.  
 737 Name changed, private session, 'Simeon'.  
 738 Name changed, private session, 'Donnie'.  
 739 Name changed, private session, 'Donnie'.  
 740 Name changed, private session, 'Ross Andrew'.  
 741 Name changed, private session, 'Ross Andrew'.  
 742 Name changed, private session, 'Calyn'.  
 743 Name changed, private session, 'Calyn'.  
 744 Name changed, private session, 'Annabelle Jane'.  
 745 Name changed, private session, 'Annabelle Jane'.  
 746 Name changed, private session, 'Hannah Mary'.  
 747 Name changed, private session, 'Hannah Mary'.  
 748 Name changed, private session, 'Hannah Mary'.  
 749 Name changed, private session, 'Arlen'.  
 750 Name changed, private session, 'Arlen'.  
 751 Name changed, private session, 'Arlen'.  
 752 Name changed, private session, 'Kent'.  
 753 Name changed, private session, 'Kent'.  
 754 Name changed, private session, 'Braddon'.  
 755 Name changed, private session, 'Braddon'.  
 756 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey'.  
 757 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey'.  
 758 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey'.  
 759 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 760 Name changed, private session, 'Joshua Michael'.  
 761 Name changed, private session, 'Pierce'.  
 762 Name changed, private session, 'Pierce'.  
 763 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 764 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 765 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 766 Name changed, private session, 'Peta'.  
 767 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin Jane'.  
 768 Name changed, private session, 'Angie'.  
 769 Name changed, private session, 'Angie'.  
 770 Name changed, private session, 'Dani'.  
 771 Name changed, private session, 'Dani'.  
 772 Name changed, private session, 'Shane'.  
 773 Name changed, private session, 'Shane'.  
 774 Name changed, private session, 'Pierce'.  
 775 Name changed, private session, 'Pierce'.  
 776 Name changed, private session, 'Krystle'.  
 777 Name changed, private session, 'Krystle'.  
 778 Name changed, private session, 'Krystle'.  
 779 Name changed, private session, 'Hannah Mary'.  
 780 Name changed, private session, 'Hannah Mary'.  
 781 Name changed, private session, 'Ralph Steven'.



782 Name changed, private session, 'Ralph Steven'.  
 783 Name changed, private session, 'Dawson'.  
 784 Name changed, private session, 'Oliver Patrick'.  
 785 Name changed, private session, 'Oliver Patrick'.  
 786 Name changed, private session, 'Braddon'.  
 787 Name changed, private session, 'Braddon'.  
 788 Name changed, private session, 'Joshua Michael'.  
 789 Name changed, private session, 'Joshua Michael'.  
 790 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 791 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 792 Name changed, private session, 'Dawson'.  
 793 Name changed, private session, 'Dawson'.  
 794 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey Christopher'.  
 795 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey Christopher'.  
 796 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey Christopher'.  
 797 Name changed, private session, 'Ross Andrew'.  
 798 Name changed, private session, 'Ross Andrew'.  
 799 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey Christopher'.  
 800 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey Christopher'.  
 801 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 802 Name changed, private session, 'Carrie'.  
 803 Name changed, private session, 'Carrie'.  
 804 Name changed, private session, 'Ruth May'.  
 805 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey'.  
 806 Name changed, private session, 'Jeffrey'.  
 807 Name changed, private session, 'Dermott'.  
 808 Name changed, private session, 'Dermott'.  
 809 Name changed, private session, 'Alan Sam'.  
 810 Name changed, private session, 'Gene Luke'.  
 811 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 812 Name changed, private session, 'Braddon'.  
 813 Name changed, private session, 'Renata'.  
 814 Name changed, private session, 'Renata'.  
 815 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin Jane'.  
 816 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin Jane'.  
 817 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin Jane'.  
 818 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin Jane'.  
 819 Name changed, private session, 'Alan Sam'.  
 820 Name changed, private session, 'Alan Sam'.  
 821 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 822 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 823 Name changed, private session, 'Dan Peter'.  
 824 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 825 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 826 Name changed, private session, 'Sabrina May'.  
 827 Name changed, private session, 'Calyn'.  
 828 Name changed, private session, 'Calyn'.  
 829 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 830 Name changed, private session, 'Findlay'.  
 831 Name changed, private session, 'Kayla'.  
 832 Name changed, private session, 'Kayla'.  
 833 Name changed, private session, 'Shaun Michael'.  
 834 Name changed, private session, 'Shaun Michael'.  
 835 Name changed, private session, 'Merle'.  
 836 Name changed, private session, 'Merle'.  
 837 Name changed, private session, 'Roslyn'.  
 838 Name changed, private session, 'Roslyn'.  
 839 Name changed, private session, 'Jody'.  
 840 Name changed, private session, 'Jody'.  
 841 Name changed, private session, 'Marcelle'.  
 842 Name changed, private session, 'Marcelle'.  
 843 Names changed, private session, 'Lindy and Jackson'.  
 844 Names changed, private session, 'Lindy and Jackson'.  
 845 Name changed, private session, 'Jason Michael'.

846 Name changed, private session, 'Jason Michael'.  
 847 Names changed, private session, 'Summer and Pete' (parents).  
 848 Names changed, private session, 'Summer and Pete' (parents).  
 849 Names changed, private session, 'Summer and Pete' (parents).  
 850 Name changed, private session, 'Ralph Steven'.  
 851 Name changed, private session, 'Helena'.  
 852 Name changed, private session, 'Helena'.  
 853 Name changed, private session, 'Joey'.  
 854 Name changed, private session, 'Joey'.  
 855 Name changed, private session, 'Joey'.  
 856 Name changed, private session, 'Tui'.  
 857 Name changed, private session, 'Donnie'.  
 858 Name changed, private session, 'Cassie'.  
 859 Name changed, private session, 'Cassie'.  
 860 Name changed, private session, 'Roslyn'.  
 861 Name changed, private session, 'Velma' (parent).  
 862 Name changed, private session, 'Velma' (parent).  
 863 Name changed, private session, 'Helena'.  
 864 Name changed, private session, 'Nicole Jane'.  
 865 Name changed, private session, 'Nicole Jane'.  
 866 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin'.  
 867 Name changed, private session, 'Tamsin'.  
 868 Name changed, private session, 'Christine'.  
 869 Name changed, private session, 'Christine'.  
 870 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 871 Name changed, private session, 'Coral'.  
 872 Name changed, private session, 'Ida'.  
 873 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.  
 874 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.  
 875 Name changed, private session, 'Rudy'.  
 876 Name changed, private session, 'Kathrin' (parent).  
 877 Name changed, private session, 'Kathrin' (parent).  
 878 Name changed, private session, 'Mariel and Jayke'.  
 879 Name changed, private session, 'Mariel and Jayke'.  
 880 Name changed, private session, 'Penny'.  
 881 Name changed, private session, 'Penny'.  
 882 Name changed, private session, 'Penny'.  
 883 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 884 Name changed, private session, 'Imogen'.  
 885 Name changed, private session, 'Imogen'.  
 886 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).  
 887 Name changed, private session, 'Samantha' (parent).  
 888 Name changed, private session, 'Stephan'.  
 889 Name changed, private session, 'Becky Sue'.  
 890 Name changed, private session, 'Becky Sue'.  
 891 Name changed, private session, 'Amanda Jane'.  
 892 Name changed, private session, 'Amanda Jane'.  
 893 Name changed, private session, 'Sheldon'.  
 894 Name changed, private session, 'Sheldon'.  
 895 Private session, 2015.  
 896 Name changed, private session, 'Phillip David'.  
 897 Name changed, private session, 'Rodney Adam'.  
 898 Name changed, private session, 'Gavin'.  
 899 Name changed, private session, 'Gavin'.  
 900 Name changed, private session, 'Raph'.  
 901 Name changed, private session, 'Gerald'.  
 902 Name changed, private session, 'Raquel'.  
 903 Name changed, private session, 'Raquel'.  
 904 Name changed, private session, 'Trent James'.  
 905 Name changed, private session, 'Dee'.  
 906 Name changed, private session, 'Ellis Owen'.  
 907 Name changed, private session, 'Cory'.  
 908 Name changed, private session, 'Cory'.



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

Commonwealth of Australia

Royal Commission into Institutional  
Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

ISBN 978-1-925622-46-1  
Published December 2017